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Collaborative Practices of Exemplary College Student Services Practitioners: An Exploration of Boundary Interactions

by

Diane Jean Rhyason

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Collaborative Practices of Exemplary College Student Services Practitioners: An Exploration of Boundary Management Interactions" submitted by Diane Jean Rhyason in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Administration and Leadership.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is a product of a challenging journey that was enriched and supported by my family. I dedicate this work, first and foremost, to them. My husband, Robert, has been constant in his love and friendship and support. I am grateful that he understood the necessity for me to reach this goal. My children, Joshua, Tevye, Bohdan and his wife Debra, have been my touchstones, my pride, and continue to be my greatest accomplishment. Not many mothers have the privilege of going to school with their children, as I have, spending these last two years at the University of Alberta with my sons as they studied in their chosen fields.

But also, this work is dedicated to my many college friends and colleagues who, over many years, have enriched my student services experience. I am constantly grateful to those who shared in my story, and journeyed with me chapter-by-chapter, and page-by-page.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative and interpretive study is to explore student services work through an examination of the personal and practical collaborative strategies of selected exemplary student services practitioners in two-year colleges. Specifically, the study examines how the practitioners perceive and describe their work as they interact along the boundaries of their positions with a variety of individuals to encourage learning and development in college students.

The eight participants were purposefully selected from among the recipients of an award presented to exemplary student services practitioners at the annual Alberta Services for Students Conference. The criteria for the award are established by Alberta student service practitioners and leaders and therefore serve as a definition of exemplary practice in Alberta colleges. They are an eclectic group with experience in a range of student service areas.

The study collected data through conversational interviews structured around flexible, open-ended questions. Participants were also asked to complete and score the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (HBQ). The scale measures boundary thickness and thinness and was developed by Ernest Hartmann, Tufts University School of Medicine. Interview data were coded through an open coding process followed by axial coding using both inductive and deductive analysis. The process included auditing and member checking.

Results of the study suggest that collaboration is a key part of exemplary student services practice. Boundary metaphors appear to be a natural framework for

examining collaboration. The study identifies boundary perceptiveness and trans-positional boundary spaces as key concepts in collaborative practice.

This study is significant in its concentration on the day-to-day experiences of student service practitioners in two-year colleges in Alberta. Existing research in student services focuses primarily on students and administrators in four-year institutions. By examining day-to-day experiences, the study accomplishes two significant things. Firstly, it gives voice to experience and wisdom that has until now been silent. Secondly, by using boundary management theory as a lens, it provides some practical ideas that may improve collaborative practice. These improved practices may, in turn, support enhanced environments for student learning and development.

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An academic and intellectual journey such as the one culminating with this study is always enriched by encounters along the way. Each encounter affects the direction and outcome of the undertaking. I am grateful to have benefited from many such interactions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore student services work through an examination of the personal and practical collaborative strategies of selected exemplary student services practitioners in two-year colleges. Specifically, the study examines how these practitioners perceive and describe their work within, between, and across the boundaries of their positions. The focus is on those interactions that result when collaborative endeavours require some stretching or modifying of positional boundaries, the perceived and defined limits of particular roles or positions. The themes and issues currently arising in literature related to student services practice, collaborative practice, and organization and management illustrate the need for student services practitioners to work effectively on these boundaries.

Justification for the Study

Traditional practice in student services focused on the theories of student development and the experiences that students have outside the classroom that relate to their psychological and social development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). More recently, however, the literature has focused on the application of learning theories to students' out-of-class experiences, bringing student learning into the core of student services practice (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997; Love & Goodsell Love, 1995; Stage, Watson, & Terrell, 1999). The connection between student

services and student learning is not a new concept for practitioners. Practitioners know from discussions with students, and from their own research and observation, that students grow and develop in a holistic way, and that they learn best when they are actively and broadly engaged with the institution (Astin, 1993; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994; Tinto, 1997). This practical knowledge is now reflected in the theory, as research connects and integrates the students' out-of-class experiences with learning in the college classroom (Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994; Schroeder, 1993).

A further reflection of the development of a broader and more inclusive understanding of the impact of the students' out-of-class experiences has been the new terminology used to describe such experiences. Student support programs and services were originally referred to as "extra-curricular," a term that implies a complete separation from classroom activity. During the middle 1980s and early 1990s, the term became "co-curricular" (Stage et al., 1999, p. 29) implying that out-of-class learning occurs in conjunction with, or parallel to, the academic curriculum. Current literature refers to "seamless learning" implying that academic and student services units should work together to develop the campus context in which the student is regarded in a holistic manner (Stage et al., 1999). The concept of "seamlessness" was demonstrated in a study of the out-of-class learning of 149 seniors at 12 colleges and universities in the United States (Kuh, 1993). The research found that in many instances, when students talked about learning, they "described a seamlessness between learning in and out of the classroom, suggesting that the boundaries between academics and student life beyond the classroom—often perceived by faculty and administrators to be real—were blurred so as to be indistinguishable to students" (Kuh, 1993, p. 298).

The concept of seamless learning is now also reflected in the core documents of the student services profession. The American College Personnel Association statement titled *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (1994) makes explicit what students have known all along...that their lives and learning experiences at college are not compartmentalized into academic and developmental areas. A follow-up document, titled *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (1997) begins with a focus on engaging students in active learning and includes, as one of seven principles, the imperative to forge partnerships that advance student learning. A similar document developed by the Senior Student Services Officers (1991) from the public colleges and technical institutes of Alberta states that "The educational goals of post-secondary institutions are best realized through a partnership of Student Services personnel with students, administrators, and faculty" (p. 2).

The overarching theme in much of the recent literature is the imperative for student services practitioners to operationalize the concept of the whole student by forming partnerships (Stage et al., 1999), transcending artificial boundaries (Kuh et al., 1994), and working collaboratively (American College Personnel Association, 1994; Consolvo, Seville, & Ogrosky, 1997) with other institutional agents to develop a campus context for student learning and personal development.

Existing organizational structures within college student services also support the notion of practitioners being capable of working collaboratively across positional boundaries. Although there is significant consistency across institutions in the core purpose of student services, the specific organizational units that form a student services department will vary considerably from college to college. Some student services departments contain only counselling, health, and advising services. Others

span the student experience from recruitment, retention, and campus life through to alumni services. The variety arises from the necessity for the student services mandate to reflect the overall institutional mission, which, in turn, reflects the philosophical beliefs of that institution about student learning (Barr, Desler, & Associates, 2000). Whatever the mission, it is highly likely that any college student services department will encompass a wide variety of professionals including nurses, recreation specialists, counsellors, psychologists, financial advisors, academic advisors, and others with specialties such as learning specialists, career advisors, and librarians. These practitioners have dual roles as career professionals and as student services professionals. This duality results in a complex organizational unit that is a "collection of overlapping knowledge systems within a wider occupational community" (Araujo, 1998, p. 329). Within such an environment, it is necessary for these professionals to employ positional boundary spanning even within their own unit.

Positional boundaries for student services practitioners are normally developed through professional training and guidelines, and then further defined through job descriptions within the college. Although there are some positions, such as psychologists, that are rigidly defined by professional parameters, the majority of positions within a student services department are institutionally defined and, as is the case of the structuring of student services, the compositions and boundaries of positions vary widely from institution to institution. Some institutions have academic advisors. Others combine that role with the counselling function. Additionally, positional boundaries change as incumbents change. The rigour with which an individual maintains those boundaries depends on the environment within the

organization and the individual's particular interpretation of the role (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000).

Student services practice has often been considered "on the borders" (Garland, 1986) of two other major campus groups: the students and the faculty. Garland sees this as a strength enabling practitioners to be integrators. To approach student issues in a holistic manner, student services practitioners also interact with parents, community groups, police forces, churches, and other institutions. Working successfully between and among these groups to develop strong teams and networks of support for students necessitates that student services practitioners be effective border, or boundary, managers. Despite this conclusion, there is little evidence of research or writing within student services about this topic.

Current organizational and educational literature places great emphasis on the concepts of teams, collaboration, networking, partnerships, communities of practice, and organizational learning (Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 1997; Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; O'Banion, 1998; Schön, 1983; Senge, 1990). Organizational literature is also the primary source of research on current thinking about job and position descriptions (Bridges, 1994; Williams, 1999; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). All of these approaches imply, if not specify, the importance of boundary management.

This study attempted two things. First, using the concept of boundary management as a framework, the study looked at how outstanding student services practitioners understand, stretch, and cross the boundaries that define their professional role, their role as members of a student services team, and their work with other "territories." The result of the study is the application or integration of appropriate concepts from boundary theory to the current practices in student services. Second, the study gave voice to the experience and wisdom of

practitioners with respect to collaborative practice. The result is several findings related to the role and function of collaboration within student services.

Research Questions

Many possible research questions arose from a review of the research literature in the field (Johnson & Cheathem, n.d.). The recent thinking of leaders in student services helped narrow the topic. The document titled *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning*, developed by the Joint Task Force on Student Learning (1998) highlights the importance of collaboration in the support of learning in postsecondary institutions. Schroeder (2001) builds upon this document with a list of important future research questions. That document and those questions focused my thinking. Two questions were particularly related to the questions that I wanted to address in this study. They were "What are the elements or characteristics that are basic to the concept of collaboration?" and "What personal or professional attributes of individuals contribute to success within a collaborative partnership?" (p. 9). The topics addressed in this study are somewhat derivative of Schroeder's questions, with a further focus on collaborative practice as it occurs within, along, or outside the boundaries of student services positions.

Generally the study seeks to understand and reflect the perceptions of outstanding student services practitioners related to collaboration as one of the distinguishing features of their work. The following questions are addressed in this study.

1. How do these outstanding practitioners see the role and function of collaboration within student services practice?
2. What factors do these practitioners perceive to be important to a successful collaborative approach to student services?

3. How does collaborative practice impact college student learning and development?
4. What boundary management strategies and tactics do these individuals use as they work collaboratively within, along, and outside of their positional boundaries?
5. What terminology and images do practitioners use to express their perceptions of collaborative practice?

Significance of the Study

Current college impact studies on student outcomes cover a wide variety of topics including development of cognitive skills, attitudes, the influence of peers, and the impact of interactions with faculty. Other studies have shown that strong student services programs have a positive impact on retention rates to graduation (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999; Love, 1995; Kuh, Shuh, & Whitt, 1991; Kuh et al., 1994; Kuh, 1993, 1995). Little information is available about the specific work of individual student services practitioners and their perspectives on student success (Blimling, 2001, p. 6), or on the actual strategies used by practitioners in their collaborative work. Without research on the work of student services practitioners, it seems possible that colleges may be overlooking opportunities to enhance the student experience and student learning (Love, 1995). The results of this study provide a richer understanding of the collaborative strategies used by successful practitioners.

The study may help administrators understand some of the factors that can enhance the work of student services practitioners and the role that such individuals play in the life and learning of students in two-year colleges. The study provides insights for practitioner development programs and for individuals working in the field. The study also adds to the very sparse research related to student services work in the province of Alberta. Through the development of terms and images

descriptive of practice and understandable outside the practice, the study may help practitioners develop a shared understanding with others in the college of their role in student learning and development.

Study Approach

The approach of this study differs significantly from others within the current research related to student services. First, as already mentioned, the study concentrates on the day-to-day work of the practitioner and not on students, or on leaders, or on organizations. It presents the voices of those individuals. Second, it looks at collaboration with an inter-positional focus rather than through a group or organizational framework. Third, the participants were not specifically asked about boundary issues, as was done in the studies of others (Collazo-Baker, 2000; McKinney-Dhalenne, 1999). Instead, the topic was presented as part of the during the summary of the research purpose that was part of the introduction to the interview session. The conversational interview focused on the participants' descriptions of collaborative experiences. Those descriptions were analyzed and interpreted for their meaning relating to collaboration and boundary.

Terminology

The importance of terminology has already been highlighted as one of the questions to be addressed within this study. The literature review in Chapter Two suggests that a common understanding about the role and function of student services does not currently exist within the postsecondary environment. A similar lack of consensus surrounds the terminology of collaboration and boundary theory.

The terms presented here are those around which enough commonality exists to structure a definition. Chapter Two provides further insight into the literature surrounding the terminology issue. Chapters Four and Five present the terminology emerging from the study.

Seven terms, important to the understanding of this study, are defined to provide direction to the study. Although these are common terms, their use and meaning in both practice and literature allows for the following definitions.

Two-year colleges

Colleges in Alberta are less easily defined than the universities that offer four-year degrees and graduate studies. Although two-year programs designed to send graduates to the workplace are common, most of the colleges in Alberta offer programs of varying length and purpose. Program length may vary from a few weeks to four years. Program focus may include career training, technical and trades training, adult upgrading, and university transfer. Most Alberta colleges now offer applied degrees. Institutional titles include terms such as vocational college, community college, technical institute, and regional college, The colleges included within the scope of this study are those Alberta colleges and technical institutes that offer two-year credentialed programs as a significant part of the programming mix at the institution.

Student services or student affairs

There are various terms used to describe what is commonly known in Alberta as "student services." For the most part, American institutions and therefore

American literature use the term "student affairs." As management fads come and go at institutions, a plethora of other terms have been used to reflect the institutional mission. Such terms as "student development department," "student and enrollment services," "student life department" can be found on organizational charts in Alberta colleges. The term "student services," however, remains commonly understood. This paper uses the term "affairs" only when quoting or in direct reference to materials using the term.

Practitioner or professional

The literature concerning student services uses practitioner and professional interchangeably. This study will use the term "practitioner." The term is chosen because of the nature and variety of the educational preparation undertaken by those working within student services. Many of these individuals have "professional" training (e.g., counsellors, nurses, and psychologists). This study, however, concentrates on the work of these individuals in the broader student services context and not in the narrower context of a particular profession. Additionally, this study includes data relating to individuals who work the front lines with students and may include administrative support staff as well as professionals. All these individuals are student services practitioners and can have significant impact on the lives of students.

A further and important parameter is used in this study. The study focuses on the work of "practitioners," defined as those individuals who have daily and frequent contact with students. Student services administrators, who are practitioners in the sense that they are not "theorists," are not the focus of this study, although their input is used as confirming information.

Student learning and development

The term student development has always been understood by practitioners as a key purpose of student services practice, and has generally implied student growth within areas such as ethics, morality, responsibility, teamwork, and community service. The addition of the word learning is used here to imply that such skills are "learned" and that this learning is an integral part of the students' in- and out-of-class experience. The combined term is used throughout this study to highlight this holistic approach to student learning.

Collaboration

As indicated in the literature review in Chapter Two, there are multiple meanings for this term within the literature. For the purposes of this study, collaboration is seen as a style of practice that includes a process of coming together in informal or formal ways to share knowledge and to create innovative solutions that lead to a quality of action superior to that of any individual effort. It is an approach to interrelationships that could involve individuals from within a particular student services department, from other college units, and from outside the college itself. Collaboration occurs through a "set of interlocking and shifting relations with porous and fluid boundaries" (Araujo, 1998, p. 317). This process is sometimes labeled as teamwork, but the concept of team in the current literature implies a much more formal relationship (e.g., self-directed teams, cross-functional teams) than the relationships that are the focus of this study.

Seamlessness

This concept of seamlessness advances the notion of collaboration beyond the notion of removing the traditional barriers between learning locations, such as high school and college, college and work, or in-class and out-of-class (Komives, n.d.; Kuh, 1996; Williams, 2000). It is more than removing artificial barriers. It is the intentional building of continuing connections using a wide range of expertise for the purpose of supporting student learning and development.

Boundary management

Collaborative activities within an organization result in a need for individuals to operate at, near, or across the perceived demarcations that separate individuals from others, or separate the responsibilities of particular employment positions from others. For the purpose of this study, boundary management is taken to include the concepts of boundary characteristics, boundary strategies and tactics, and boundary interactions. These concepts help to describe the dynamic and emergent activities and processes that are used to either create separateness or integration in particular situations. Boundary management is a key strategic skill in effective collaboration and, done appropriately, can clarify roles and reduce conflict (Mintzberg, Jorgensen, Dougherty, & Westley, 1996) and improve the quality of human service (Liedtka, Whitten, & Sorrells-Jones, 1998; Rist, 1992). Boundary management is often considered to be an organizational strategy. This study considers boundary management as an individual practice, and examines the collection of strategies used by individuals to manage situations that occur on the boundaries of their positions.

Within the concepts of boundary characteristics, strategies and tactics, and interactions, an even greater range of confusing labels emerges. This study attempts, in part, to clarify this confusion and to develop labels that reflect the understanding of the participants.

Summary

This qualitative interpretive study examines the collaborative experiences of exemplary student services practitioners in two-year colleges. Specifically, the study looks at the interactions occurring along positional boundaries, using theories drawn from student services, educational, and organizational literature. The study adds to the sparse research available on college student services in Canada. It suggests an approach to collaborative practice based on boundary management theories.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Three strands of scholarship and research interrelate to support the direction of this study. First, student services theory and practice provide a context for the study. This section provides an introduction to the theories underpinning the practice, highlights the nature and emphasis of current research, examines the role of student learning and development within the practice, and focuses several aspects of practice. Second, collaboration is presented as it emerges from other fields of study and from within the educational environment. Third, the study examines the applicability of boundary management, drawn from organizational literature, as a framework for the examination of positional boundary issues in collaborative student services practice.

Student Services Theory and Practice

College student services can be described as "on the borders" (Garland, 1986) of the other two major campus groups, the students and the teaching faculty. On a practical level, the changing composition of the service and the variable institutional understandings of what is and what is not a "service to students" makes it difficult to describe to others within the institution and to those outside the institution, such as parents, who are impacted by the service. Yet, from the original statement of purpose in "Student Personnel Point of View" produced by the American Council on Education (1937/1994) through to the current purpose documents in the field, the essential purpose of the practice has not changed. "Creating learning environments and learning experiences for students has always

been at the heart of student affairs work" (American College Personnel Association, 1996, p.1).

Like other areas of educational practice, student services has broadened and adapted its theories and approaches to student learning and development in light of new knowledge and the changing nature of college students.

Theory

One of the major misinterpretations of "student services" is to equate it to "counselling services". This is perhaps understandable in light of the foundational theories of the practice. The student services discipline is founded on theories, primarily psychological, developed during the 1970s. It was during this period, following angry student challenges to an arbitrary, monolithic system which characterized the 1960s, that institutions tried to regain credibility with students by understanding more about the motivation and needs of the young adult. The seminal work of Chickering (1969) set the framework for much of the future study of student development, identifying the seven vectors of social growth and identity development as (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) developing autonomy, (d) establishing identity, (e) freeing interpersonal relationships, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. Rhoads and Black (1995) identify that student developmental theory became the second wave of theorizing within the practice, replacing the first wave, which was framed by the notion of *in loco parentis* and emphasized student conformity to social custom. Since Chickering, works such as Perry's (1999) theory of intellectual and ethical development, Gilligan's (1983/1993) work on women's ways of knowing, Kohlberg's (1981) early work on moral development, and Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning all enriched and

advanced the knowledge of student development now available to help practitioners make sense of the multiplicity of behaviours and attitudes of students of all ages and backgrounds. Kuh, Shuh, and Whitt (1991) and Astin (1989) expanded the discipline to include environmental and student involvement issues. Within student services, it is generally accepted that human behaviour and learning are too complex and individual to be captured by any particular theory. This collection of theories has a tremendous richness and breadth, providing an eclectic environment in which student practitioners currently work.

Keeling (2001) asserts that student development theories have not kept pace with the changes in the reality of students. Current students are post-technological, web-babies, and post-multicultural, coming to the college from a much broader and intense experience of adolescence. "These are rapid fire, integrated, contextual learners raised in a culture that rushed them into adolescence, exploited them as consumers, and then abandoned them" (p. 4). He cautions practitioners to be ever alert to this changing population, as well as to issues that are still true in the theories that have underpinned the practice in the past.

The growing diversity among college students does not remove the need to address these issues, although it may be changing emphases. Not all students are moving at the same rate through developmental areas and nontraditional students also bring developmental issues to campus.

Practice

Although the theories underpinning student services practice are reasonably consistent, the practice based on the theories is varied, changing, and somewhat nebulous.

One of the greatest variations occurs in the academic preparation of practitioners. It has already been noted that practitioners who constitute various student services units come from a wide variety of disciplines and experiences. In the United States, many arrive in the practice through one of over 80 graduate programs available at postsecondary institutions. In Canada, there are no equivalent programs. This lack of Canadian programming reveals various limitations. Canadian practitioners are much more likely to have learned on the job. Information available on the practice is primarily focused on American two- and four-year institutions. Much of what is available on practice focuses on specific units within student services or on leadership functions. There has also been an understandable and necessary focus on students rather than practitioners.

Although the composition of the practice varies, there is some consistency in how practitioners go about their day-to-day work. Identifying issues, considering various courses of action, acting, evaluating the action, thinking about what was learned, and then starting over to improve the solution—this is essentially a description of the day-to-day work of student services practitioners at a two-year college. It is also a description of the process of action research. Kemmis and McTaggert (2000) indicate that action research emerges as an approach to situations where "people want to make changes thoughtfully—that is, after critical reflection. It emerges when people want to think 'realistically' about where they are now, how things came to be that way, and, from these starting points, how, in practice, things might be changed" (p. 573). Although this is a description of action research, it also serves as an excellent description of student services practice.

Student services practitioners are the focus of this study. Four issues within the student services practice are important to this study. They are (a) student

learning and development, (b) seamlessness concepts within student services theory, (c) common and collaborative student services practice, and (d) existing definitions of outstanding practice in the field.

College student learning and development.

Although there has been consistence in the purpose of the practice, the terminology that describes this core purpose of student services has changed in recent years. Bondeson (1996) highlights the difference in perception surrounding learning and development. From the point of view of classroom faculty, development refers to the acquisition of soft skills such as interpersonal skills, attitudes, and values. Learning, on the other hand, refers to the acquisition of knowledge and subject matter competency. Bondeson goes on to say that although the distinction is usually very clear in the organizational structure of the academy, it "is, at best, a very rough one" (p. 246), and is nonexistent within the real lives of students.

This broader view of holistic learning is reflected within student services literature. Indeed, both concepts have always been part of the theories underlying student services. Common to all theories is the core belief that student services is the practice of intentional and holistic student learning and development (Evans et al., 1998). The first major document produced in the field, and often cited in historical accounts of the profession, is the "Student Personnel Point of View" produced by the American Council on Education (1937/1994). It encouraged educators to be concerned with the whole student, to educate and guide each student to his or her full potential, and to develop future contributors to society and community. More recent documents such as the student services mission statement for Alberta colleges (Senior Student Services Officers, 1991) and Canadian and American

national statements on student learning (American College Personnel Association, 1996; Canadian Association of College and University Student Services, 1989) retain the essence of this early document with respect to student learning and development.

The concept of holistic approaches also appear in the research and scholarship not directly related to student services. In her lectures on the societal impact of technology, for instance, Franklin (1999) maintains that a holistic approach is essential to tasks that require caring, feedback, and adjustment. Further, she states, "if there ever was a holistic process, a process that cannot be divided into rigid predetermined steps, it is education" (p. 22). There needs to be an increasing realization that learning is "holistic, connected to learners' lives, and characterized by multiple intelligences and ways of knowing" (Baxter Magolda & Terenzini, 1999, p. 6). A recognition and respect for students' multiple ways of knowing should result in more active, integrative, and collaborative learning.

Among the principles of good practice in student services (Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999) is the call to engage students in active learning, which encourages students to bring their life experiences into the classroom, to reflect and apply new learning to their own lives (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kuh, 1998). Such an approach, based on the three principles of "situating learning in the students' experience," "validating students as knowers," and "mutually constructing meaning" (p. 27), implies that the student will be recognized as a collaborative partner in the learning process. Blimling et al.'s call to engage students, through the intentional use of the term "engage," highlights the efforts of some to make clearer their intent. As mentioned in the first chapter, the language of collaboration is fuzzy at best,

confusing at worst. Despite this confusion, the use of this term implies that the involvement with students must be something more than currently exists.

As earlier highlighted, much of the research available to practitioners in colleges is focused on four-year institutions. Are two-year institutions different? In many significant ways they are. Unfortunately, the research again is primarily American. The most commonly mentioned differences are the greater focus on teaching, the focus on employment as a goal, and the greater diversity in student demographics (Raverta & Huskey, 2001, p. 1). These are different emphases, but not different in purpose, with the core purpose remaining as student learning and development.

Within the two-year community college context, there is also a renewed emphasis on identifying the common core of knowledge and skills necessary for the educated person. A survey of Canadian and American colleges completed by the League of Innovation in the Community College (Wilson, Miles, Baker, & Schoenberger, 2000) resulted in a list of eight categories of general skills. The Conference Board of Canada (2000) provides a list of employability skills contains similar items. Common to both studies is an emphasis on the holistic development of core interpersonal and teamwork skills, along with intellectual skills.

A qualitative study of 16 senior student services officers undertaken by Hartley (2001) specifically addresses the apparent shift of emphasis in the field from development to learning. Hartley concludes that the shift, while both practical and political, has also increased the emphasis on the need for creation of "a more integrated approach to student learning" (p. 224). This approach was still in its early stages within the institutions studied.

Seamlessness in student services theories.

The concept of seamlessness has always been part of the theories underlying student services. Common to all theories is the core belief that student services is the practice of intentional and holistic student learning and development (Evans et al., 1998).

From the earliest documents in the field, to current writing, there is the underlying sense of seamlessness. While the language of student development theories generally refers to holistic approaches, the term "seamless" has recently become common. Kuh's (1996) notion of seamlessness envisions an institution in which student learning and student development are viewed in a holistic manner and where the goal is to merge the two in an atmosphere of "educationally purposeful activities, events and experiences" (p. 135). The concept of seamlessness is a central theme of the *Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association, 1994). "Student affairs professionals attempt to make seamless what are often perceived by students to be disjointed, unconnected partnerships with faculty and others to enhance student learning" (p. 3). In this collaborative effort, student services practitioners are the "student experts;" faculty are the "knowledge experts." Student services practitioners bring to the collaboration their knowledge and advocacy about student development, student issues, student environments and cultures. Student services literature calls for a "blurring of functional boundaries between academic and student affairs divisions" (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996, p. 159). There is a need to overcome the current and traditional academic structures that feature "a constellation of independent principalities and fiefdoms" (Schroeder, 2001, p. 2) to create a common vision for undergraduate education (Komives, n.d.). Bondeson (1996) highlights the difficulty of accomplishing this goal:

"Although the distinction between learning and personal development is virtually non-existent in the real lives of students" (p. 246), most institutions still have rigid, hierarchical organizational structures and are "a very long way from supporting meaningful faculty involvement in the broader issues of student development" (p. 247).

Common practice in student services.

Extensive research exists within student services literature concerning best practices in the traditional approaches (Beede & Burnett, 1998; Berger, 1997; Blimling, 2001; Gilbert, Chapman, Grayson, & Gardner, 1997; Love, 1995). Managing residences, dealing with crises, understanding campus environments, encouraging student engagement with the institution, and assessing results will always be valid undertakings, and will continue to be core to strong practice.

If concepts of seamlessness or holism have long been part of student services theory, then collaboration should also be long standing practice. Yet the literature suggests that, both functionally and structurally, common practice has not included collaborative approaches. Not only have student services been reluctant to form alliances with academic divisions, they have resisted working across the boundaries that exist within their own units to develop seamless networks of support and experience for students. The stories related by Seymour (1995) of students being sent from office to office on campus, never quite having their needs met, are embarrassingly familiar.

This variation between theory and common practice is amply illustrated by the comments from practitioners on the Collaboration Listserv (personal communication, August 31, 1998) hosted by the American College Personnel

Association which include "I've found my experiences with collaboration a 'what can you do for me' type of endeavor" (p. 7), and "[Student Affairs] units have developed turfs where collaboration is not the norm" (p. 2). Beede and Burnett (1998) also call for change to current (or traditional) structural models of student services to meet the needs of future students. These changes are necessary to create a studentcentred and future compatible service. They join others (Blimling et al., 1999; Kuh, 1996) in criticizing most current student services organizations as uncoordinated, fragmented, and not student centred. Additionally, much of the past programming in student services has been based on the exposure model mentioned earlier. Students have been handed pamphlets and posters, given lectures about alcohol abuse or relationship issues, flooded with lists of rules and regulations, and expected to absorb and internalize the information. If today's students learn best from practical, hands-on experiences, it is logical to assume that much significant learning can take place outside of the classroom—during informal conversations with staff, on field trips, in leadership activities, and in the application of learning to their day-to-day lives. If it is also generally accepted that learning is a cumulative, integrative process (Schroeder, 2001), then exceptional practice would recognize the importance of an integrative approach to learning and seek to engage students in meaningful educational activities that straddle academic and service units.

Collaborative practice in student services.

If, as suggested by the literature, student learning and development should be seamless, then it could be assumed that the everyday practice would include collaborative activities with other practitioners, with faculty, students, and others such as parents and community services. However, there has been little research on

actual collaborative practices in student services. The few studies that do exist focus on collaborative initiatives with units external to student services (Cambiano, 2000; Consolvo, et al., 1997; White, 1993; Yeater, Miltenberger, Laden, Ellis, & O'Donohue, 2001) and not between individuals as is the approach of this current study.

Some writers in the field suggest that collaborative practice does exist within student services units, and between student services and other units (Engstrom & Tinto, 2000). This task is faced with many obstacles and constraints primarily because of "fundamental cultural differences between faculty and student affairs educators in terms of their personality styles, educational preparation, values, and purposes" (Schroeder, 1999, p. 140).

Engstrom and Tinto (2000) advance a vision of collaboration that involves students, faculty, and student services practitioners in a nonhierarchical structure where

> All group members are perceived and recognized as holding important knowledge and experiences that can contribute to the group's learning process. The responsibilities and roles of participants are in constant negotiation; authority is shared and shifts continually based on the knowledge and experiences of group members. (p. 436)

This vision, according to Engstrom and Tinto, goes beyond cooperative ventures, and demands higher levels of commitment, interdependence, shared purpose, and tolerance for ambiguity and change. The process is neither simple, nor easy.

Yeater et al. (2001) report on a successful collaborative initiative with faculty within the psychology department to offer sexual assault counselling to students. Such cooperation remains rare, and this success may be one example of what Keeling (2001) calls "glittering examples" (p. 5). Keeling maintains, however, that the

"historical (and painful) separation, while deeply connected to the origins of the professions in student affairs, undermines the college's ability to respond to students as whole human beings" (p. 5).

In his identification of the skills needed for student services practitioners in the next century, Keeling (2001) suggests that collaborative practice is not yet as endemic as it should be within the practice. He encourages a move away from a practice that he sees as "predominately quite clinical in style and orientation—taking things one problem at a time" (p. 3), and toward a practice that is more systematic, holistic, and integrative, and based on shared assumptions, work patterns, and vocabularies. Keeling's (2001) identification of the need for shared vocabulary provides the basis for an important issue within this current study as identified later in this chapter.

Outstanding practice in student services.

The literature in the field generally defines *what* good practice is, but fails to identify *how* good practice is carried out. There are descriptions of practitioners, but not their strategies. Lovell and Kosten (2000) summarize the skills, knowledge, and personal traits necessary for success as an administrator by reviewing 30 years of research. No equivalent research focuses on the work of front-line practitioners whose responsibilities involve frequent and daily contact with students.

The American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (1997) document on good practice in student affairs lists seven principles for good practice and provides inventory checklists for each principle. Blimling et al. (1999) reiterate and affirm these practices.

Good practice in student affairs:

(a) Engages the student in active learning.

(b) Helps the student develop coherent values and ethical standards.

(c) Sets and communicates high expectations for student learning.

(d) Uses systematic inquiry to improve students and institutional performance.

(e) Uses resources effectively to achieve institutional mission and goals.

(f) Forges partnerships that advance the student's learning.

(g) Builds supportive and inclusive communities. (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997, p. 1)

Although there appears to be no direct research on the work of outstanding practitioners, good practitioners are defined as the "strongest and most consistent voice in the academy for articulating concern for the human growth and development of students" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 14). They practice the art of learning from students in the student's own environment and not in an office (Sandeen, 1991). From the major topic areas covered in the handbook by Evans, it is possible to suggest that good practitioners (a) use the portions of theory that are applicable to the situation, (b) avoid the use of labels in working with individuals, (c) use theory as descriptive and not predictive, (d) give the person precedence over the theory, and (e) avoid viewing students as inert substances that can be manipulated (pp. 29-32). From other scholarship in the field, it can be suggested that competent student services practice will (a) recognize the differing mental models of others (Kuh, 1996, p. 139), (b) contribute to a campus environment and campus ethos of inclusiveness (Kuh, 1995), (c) focus on student learning in a way that blurs the distinction between in- and out-of-class experiences (Joint Task Force on Student Learning, 1998; Komives, n.d.), and (d) be dedicated to enhancing the worth, dignity, potential, and

uniqueness of each individual within postsecondary educational institutions (American College Personnel Association, 1996).

Within the province of Alberta, two sources provide a general picture of what is considered to be exemplary performance for college practitioners. These include the mission statement of the Senior Student Services Officers (1991) and the criteria for the annual student services awards. Conferred since 1990, these awards are decided according to the standards and processes determined by an inter-institutional committee from colleges and universities in the province. These sources confirm that qualities of student-centredness, learning-centredness, collaboration, and community, with two practical additions: (a) active involvement in relevant professional organizations, and (b) significant contributions to the annual conference (Alberta Services for Students Conference Committee, 2001).

The core values implicit in most of the criteria listed are a holistic focus on the student, the centrality of learning, strong ethical orientation, an inclusive approach to students, and an emphasis on community. That outstanding practice includes collaborative practice is confirmed in Blimling et al. (1999) where it is suggested that good practice requires "collaboration and cross-functional dialogue" (p. 135). Confirmation is also found in the principles of good practice set forth by the American College Personnel Association and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (1997).

All of these "good practices" present principles that concentrate on values and orientations, but do not address the actual experience of practitioners. Nor is there any explicit sense of the importance of the "inter-professional capacity" (Collens, 1998, p. 21) of practitioners in their collaborative work with others. As such,

the current research presents an incomplete picture of the day-to-day lives of student services practitioners.

Assessment of practice.

Although guidelines to good practice are available in the literature, there are few practical tools to help practitioners assess the quality of their own day-to-day collaborative activities. There are numerous tools, available for assessment within specific disciplines, found in handbooks and guides to research in the field (e.g., Barr et al., 2000; Stage, 1992; Upcraft and Shuh, 1996). Although mostly American, many could be adapted to the Alberta situation. These tools primarily assess results by looking at students or programs, however, and not at practitioners. They do not tell the practitioner whether a particular collaborative program or strategy has been successful. For this kind of information in a timely manner, college practitioners depend on informal and reflective feedback.

Issue identification, problem solving, and problem avoidance constitute a significant portion of a student services practitioner's day-to-day work (Brown, Podolske, Kohles, & Sonnenberg, 1992). Student related issues are addressed within the context of the applicable theories of student development, requiring the understanding of complex human issues, of inexplicable human action, and always with the goal of student learning. It is through a cyclical process that student services practitioners assess and improve their practice. This is particularly true for practitioners in the two-year colleges where research and writing are not part of the mandate of the organization. These practitioners would likely agree with Schön (1995) when he suggests that "often we cannot say what we know" (p. 30).

Collaboration in the Broader Context

In the College Environment

The work life of the participants of this study has taken place within an environment that currently places collaboration and partnership as core values of the system. In Alberta, the business plans from Alberta Learning identify broad goals for postsecondary systems as increased accessibility, affordability, effectiveness, responsiveness, and relevance (Alberta Learning, 1999). These goals have resulted in funding restrictions and reallocations along with significant system change. To assist in implementing these goals, the provincial government developed performance indicators and created new funding mechanisms to encourage innovation. Funding has been provided for increased institutional collaboration, partnerships, technology implementation, and distance learning initiatives (Alberta Learning, 1997). The provincial vision of a "Campus Alberta"..."is a concept, a set of principles and a way in which the learning system works together to develop seamless learning opportunities for Albertans" (Alberta Learning, 2002, p. 5). The document goes on to claim that "stakeholders are increasingly using collaboration as both an essential tool in fulfilling their mandates and as an indicator of success" (p. 6). This claim finds support in a review of calendar offerings of most institutions where there are listed a significant number of partnership agreements for the offering of joint credentials, degree completion, distance delivery, and joint course offerings.

Consistent with the larger context of undergraduate education in North America, there is an emphasis in Alberta on increasing the quality of the student learning experience (American College Personnel Association, 1996; Blimling, 1996;

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; Kuh et al., 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Stage, Watson, & Terrell, 1999). In Alberta, this has translated into a series of required performance reporting elements measuring student satisfaction, student completion rates, transferability, student employment rates, and follow-up with employers (Alberta Learning, 1997).

Within the Canadian community college context, there is also a renewed emphasis on identifying the common core of knowledge and skills necessary for the educated person. Results of a survey of Canadian and American colleges completed by the League of Innovation in the Community College (Wilson, Miles, Baker, & Schoenberger, 2000) identify essential learning outcomes as (a) communication skills, (b) computation skills, (c) community skills, (d) critical thinking and problem solving skills, (e) information management skills, (f) interpersonal skills, (g) personal skills, and (h) technology skills. The Conference Board of Canada (2001) produces a list of employability skills that contains very similar categories. Common to both, and within the mandate of student services, is an emphasis on the holistic development of core interpersonal and teamwork skills.

in the Educational Environment

Research related to the K-12 environment has long included topics related to both collaborative learning where students work and learn together, and collaborative teaching where instructors from different disciplines work together (Bruffee, 1999). This literature provides some of the most useful concepts for transfer to a college student services context. In his summative comments about teaching in senior high schools in Alberta, Riordan (1996) concludes that "collaboration has generally been embraced with enthusiasm in the education literature" (p. 38) and is seen as

contribution to improved student learning. Although there have been relatively few studies with an emphasis on the college context, Foote (1998) provides summaries of eight recent research studies on collaborative learning in American community colleges and concludes that the approach has "promising possibilities for active learning and student self-reliance" (p. 173).

The literature related to special education is particularly rich with information concerning collaborative practice and provides some terminology that is applicable to student services. Of particular interest are the terms interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary as they are applied to teams. Transdisciplinary approaches are a more recent concept (Carpenter, King-Sears, & Keys, 1998; Chapman & Ware, 1999; Friend & Cook, 2000; Lambert, 1990). In this continuum of terms, Friend and Cook describe the transdisciplinary approaches as

> the most recent to have evolved in special education and related services. They are also the most collaborative of all the team models. In these teams, professionals perform their related tasks interactively and individual team members may actually share or blend their roles. In a process known as role release, professional roles are combined, at least in part, and one or two team members may be responsible for delivering all the interventions to a student. Other team members remain available to assist and advise the primary interventionists through consultation, training, and feedback. Members with different disciplinary expertise share their skills in order to make this possible (p. 35).

The other two approaches to collaboration are characterized by role boundaries that remain more clearly delineated. All three approaches have a variety of disciplines involved. The difference is in the way that they interact within the collaboration. "The very nature of transdisciplinary teaming suggests that participants be open to acquiring new roles as needed and exchanging roles with other team members" (Carpenter et al., 1998, p. 5).

This description of multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary teaming can be applied to student services practice, which has already been identified as being extremely eclectic in nature. Missing from the educational literature and from the student services literature, however, is the examination and description of how individuals work within teams that, by their nature, challenge positional boundaries. The result of that absence is the creation, within the results of this study, of a new descriptive term. The idea of "trans-positional" space as a location for collaboration is further examined in the chapters to follow.

Within Organizational Literature

Organizational literature is another rich source of information about collaboration. In Arujo's (1998) research on collaboration, he used the term "collective practices" to identify situations where individuals come together to use their knowledge as generalists or specialists, and build a quality of action superior to any individual effort. Arujo claims that knowledge resides "not in the heads of individuals, but in teams of individuals sharing common experiences and with only a partial and incomplete picture" (p. 4) of the whole. This situation certainly exists within student services with its many different disciplines of practice and its emphasis on holistic solutions.

One major difference is the concentration of this literature on the usefulness of collaboration as a tool to improve financial productivity. In contrast, the literature from education and student services has a greater emphasis on improving student learning, which is a type of productivity measure, but without the emphasis on financial benefits.

Boundary Theory

Boundary is a pervasive and common term in our everyday lives. In addition, the concept of boundary has distinct and divergent applications across a variety of disciplines, and has long been part of the research within the physical sciences, communications research, psychology, and political sciences. Very broadly, boundary refers to the "physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 31). The development of boundary theories in educational and organizational studies is relatively new (Halley, 1997). The work within the fields of psychology, human communications research, education, and organizational behaviour is of most interest to this study.

Within the field of psychology, boundaries, or boundaries of self, are discussed as an essential aspect of identity. Without boundaries, it is impossible for an individual to have a sense of where self ends and others begin. Boundaries are seen as socially constructed, mental fences. A significant amount of the scholarship refers to boundary transitions and crossings between work and home, work and work, and work and a third place, such as a volunteer organization (Ashforth et al., 2000). As discussed later in this paper, it is the work of Hartmann (1991) that develops the potential for applying psychological boundary concepts to organizational studies. Hartmann provides a descriptive, but not necessarily prescriptive, concept of boundaries as being thick or thin, and provides a simple questionnaire to describe the characteristics of an individual's boundaries.

Significant work related to boundary and boundary interactions comes from human communications research. In this discipline, the research concentrates on boundaries between individuals as they relate to the effectiveness of

communications (Petronio, Ellemers, Giles, & Gallois, 1998; Wilson, Roloff, & Carey, 1998). An entire issue of *Human Communications Research* (2000, v. 26/3) was devoted to research using the boundary metaphor in problematic communications between individuals.

Within the field of education, while there is significant work related to collaboration, teamwork, and networking, there is not a lot of work using boundary theory as a framework. Recent work using the boundary concept concentrates primarily on collaborations between schools and outside organizations and uses an organizational theory framework (Collazo-Baker, 2000; Johnston, 1997; Magolda, 2001).

In organizational literature, ideas around teamwork, network, collaboration, and partnerships occupy a central place (Ashforth et al., 2000; Beck & Yeager, 1996; Mintzberg, Jorgensen, Dougherty, & Westley, 1996). Collaboration is often identified as a way for companies to become more competitive, effective and profitable, and to enable employees to be more innovative and productive (Halley, 1997). Supportive relationships among employees are seen as vital to organizational effectiveness (Bacharach, Bamberger, & McKinney, 2000). Each of these approaches to management necessitates a practice of working with others in a dynamic environment, where boundary management is one key to success. Morgan (1998), in discussing boundaries within the organization such as the boundary between different work groups or departments or between an organization and its environment" (p. 167).

The most comprehensive work within boundary literature is that undertaken by Halley (1995). In an extensive lexical survey of boundary literature, Halley identified, analyzed, and compiled a lexicon of terminology and approaches by

drawing from a substantial, interdisciplinary body of work, including physical, biological, social, economic, political-administrative, communications, and evaluation systems. Halley searched databases, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and literature in an attempt to identify and narrow the perceptions and definitions of boundary terminology. She concludes that there exists a "morass of schemes" (p. 109) for the descriptions of boundary. Most theorists end up with a typology of terms. From this confusion, Halley (1995, 1997) identifies two broad areas within the theories: foundations and dynamics. "Boundary foundations" refers to the basic terminology, approaches, perspectives, and methodologies related to the types and levels of boundaries. "Boundary dynamics" refers to the management of interactions and activities occurring along, inside, and at boundaries, including approaches to the creating, changing, defending, spanning, and managing of individual and organizational boundaries. In this follow-up study, Halley (1997) identifies seven key elements of the theory as boundary (a) types, (b) roles, (c) properties, (d) spanning infrastructures, (e) spanning processes, (f) problems, and (g) values.

Within student services, there is virtually no research using boundary theory. Although the issue of boundary arises tangentially within some of the writing about collaboration (Blimling et al., 1999), there appears to be little work that uses boundary as a framework. Most certainly, there are no prior studies examining positional boundaries in student services. Therefore, to provide a framework for this study, I have drawn on the work within organizational literature. For the purposes of this study, selected elements from Halley's categories are relevant. To frame the study, I have confined and refined the concepts identified by Halley, using both her concepts of "boundary foundations" and "boundary dynamics." The term

"management" is used here instead of dynamics because it is more common in other literature.

Boundary Foundations

Despite the extensive nature of the work, Halley's (1995, 1997, 1998) categories remain too broad and confusing to use in this study. In order to narrow the array of approaches and terminology, I used the work of McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) to clarify the meaning of boundary for the purposes of this study. In a study of burnout in organizations with formal helping mandates, McKinney-Dhalenne developed a typology of four ways to look at boundaries. Boundaries can be seen as physical or mental territory markers, as mental entities of self, or as transitional spaces.

Boundaries as territory markers that act as barriers has received the most widespread attention in the literature of many disciplines (McKinney-Dhalenne, 1999, p. 6). The concept is the most easily understood, and is useful at a macro level in the examination of boundaries of companies and countries, and at the micro level in the examination of cognitive barriers. The term is often used with the same meaning as the term border. Boundaries as territory markers creates a sense of boundary defense and maintenance, boundary violation, rules, and other negative connotations. Boundary crossing is seen as threatening and violating (Hermansson, 1997; Kennedy, 1992; Liedtka et al., 1998; Owen, 1997; Stufft, 1990; Webb, 1997; Wilson et al., 1998). The importance of boundaries as territory markers is examined by Cross, Yan, and Louis (2000) in their case study of a bank that was restructuring from a functional model to a team-based approach. One of their conclusions was that

boundary activities such as spanning, buffering, and bringing up boundaries became more prevalent as barriers between traditional positions were removed.

Boundaries of self are primarily the focus of work within psychology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. Even within this micro approach, the definitions and theories are plentiful. McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) condenses these into two broad categories of boundaries: those between self and others, and boundaries within self. Both of these imply a sense of dichotomy between connectedness or separateness, which is core to most of the work in this area. McKinney-Dhalenne also presents this sense of connection or separation as foundation to the concepts of individual identity and collective identity found within many studies. She found in her review that there was a predominance of thought that strong self-boundaries lead to independent and mentally healthy individuals. Despite what she identifies as an historical "bias against interdependence and permeable self-boundaries, there are some researchers who argue for a reevaluation of the benefits of interpersonal connection and intimacy" (p. 18). This issue is raised here because it has implications for the current predominance of collaboration as a useful tool. To be most effective, collaboration requires a high degree of interdependence. It may, thus, be contradictory to the values that have been held as important to have in good employees, who are now being asked to become interdependent.

The work of Hartmann (1991, 1997), which is used as one of the bases for this study, falls within this realm of self-boundaries. Hartmann suggests that boundaries of self can be measured as thick or thin. This thickness or thinness affects an individual's degree of openness, sensitivity, concern for others, and ability to trust. Since these factors are also suggested as being important to successful

collaboration (da Costa & Riordan, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2000; Johnston, 1997), it is logical to think that self-boundaries have an impact on collaborative practice.

Examining boundaries as transitional spaces, rather than barriers, has formed the basis for a few studies (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; Bacharach et al., 1997; Chagnon, 1997; Nippert-Eng, 1995). This is a view of boundaries as social constructions that serve as places for interactions between individuals, groups, or organizations. In this view, the concepts of permeability and flexibility emerge as important characteristics of boundaries. Studies look at the activities and tactics that occur in those spaces, and the ease or difficulty that individuals have in moving across the transitional spaces. For example, the work of Ashforth et al. examined the tactics used by individuals as they made the transition back and forth between their roles at work and home. Trost (2000) notes that most human communications research views boundaries as "fluid space of relational contention and transformation, rather than a more static and separatist notion of an immutable line of defense" (p. 516).

Several writers see interactions on the boundary as spaces of creativity and knowledge creation. Collens (1998) refers to the need for "inter-professional capacity" (p. 3) that enables effective workers to draw knowledge from across professional boundaries. He sees a need for the educational system to develop such "renaissance professionals" (p. 4), who will be the leaders in creativity, innovation, and problem solving. Kuh (1996) calls for the development of seamless environments for undergraduate students' learning. This is, in essence, a call for boundary permeability, where "all members of an institution must work together to link programs and activities across the academic and out-of-class dimensions of students' lives" (p. 137). Kuh envisions environments in which collaboration is

normative and professionals merge their interests and knowledge with that of others in a shared vision of a seamless learning environment. Araujo (1998) proposes that organizational learning occurs most effectively when committed, knowledgeable, and reflective individuals work in a network of "interlocking and shifting relations with porous and fluid boundaries" (p. 137).

This study looks at boundary from two perspectives. First, it examines the self-boundaries of the study participants. Second, it looks at the positional boundaries of the participants as transitional spaces where various tactics and actions are used in the process of collaboration.

Boundary Management

Building from Halley's (1997, 1998) dynamic categories, I have selected concepts within boundary management as appropriate to the understanding of inter-practitioner boundaries and the context of this study. Boundary management provides the framework within which these three factors of characteristics, tactics, and interactions can be examined. Mankin, Cohen, and Bikson (1996) identify boundary management as a key skill for project team leaders, defining the term as "managing the relations between the team, individuals, and units external to the team, and the overall organization" (p. 103). This fails to reflect the breadth of current concepts of boundary management now appearing in the organizational literature.

Other writers use the term to describe the richer and deeper interactions that occur between individuals and groups when boundaries are intentionally permeated, blurred, or crossed. In their study of peer support providers, Bacharach et al. (2000) conclude "the management of boundaries provided an almost natural framework for providers to describe their support actions" (p. 171). These researchers define

boundary management as the use of tactical devices that are dynamic and emergent. The appropriate dynamic can clarify roles, enable collaboration, and ameliorate conflict. Higher levels of integration require more energy focused on these features (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 12). Morgan (1998) speaks of boundary management as a skill that everyone uses to develop personal autonomy, but does not provide much information about how the skill is developed or used. Good boundary management requires a good sense of balance. Mintzberg et al. (1996) refer to this as a synergy where the "optimum balance between individualism and integration" occurs (p. 6). These ideas are significant because they accept that the management of boundaries is an individual skill as well as a leadership skill.

While these two definitions describe boundary management as a skill, other writers describe it as a process (Bacharach et al., 2000; Chagnon, 1997; Petronio et al., 1998). The most applicable definition for this study comes from Petronio et al., who define boundary management as the process by which "people initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships" (p. 577). In this case, the relationships are those that occur on the boundary of a position within student services.

This study narrows the boundary management concept to three factors that are related to positional boundaries. These are boundary characteristics, boundary strategies and tactics, and boundary interactions.

Boundary characteristics.

Significant research has been undertaken in an effort to describe the nature of various boundary types. An understanding of these boundary characteristics is seen as a key to managing boundary issues. Whether the context of boundary is territorial, transitional, or self-boundaries, there are two common descriptors that can

be drawn out of these studies. The common properties are permeability and flexibility. Most writers talk about permeability and flexibility as inter-related properties on a continuum, and as such it is hard to separate them. For this study, however, I have attempted to separate the concepts.

Ashforth et al. (2000) describe personal boundaries on continuums from inflexible to flexible, and from impermeable to permeable. For Ashforth et al., permeability refers to the ability to enact more that one role at a time. In a collaborative student services situation, this could refer to acting as a nurse, but also as a member of a team that requires non-nursing roles. Flexibility and permeability, according to these researchers, can both ameliorate conflict and create conflict and confusion if not managed well. These descriptions deal only with the individual's ability to move from one defined role to another defined role. Although this kind of role transition does occur in student services collaboration, the concept is not sufficient to explain the complex interactions between individuals that are anticipated by this study. Ashforth et al. also do not deal with boundary transitions from a defined positional role to a less defined role such as those that occur in collaboration. In a study of self-organization teams, Chagnon (1997) defines permeability within an organizational context as "a condition that allows inputs and outputs to enter and exit" (p. 7).

The most generic definition is given by McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) by describing permeability as "the degree of openness, of fluidity between categories delimited by boundaries" (p. 24) and the ease with which one can move from category to category. Other definitions of permeability, found in the research and literature of specific professions, may vary slightly but essentially refer to the

porousness and openness of the boundary area. It is from these more generic standpoints that the permeability of positional boundaries is examined in this study.

For Ashforth et al. (2000) flexibility refers to the degree to which role boundaries are pliable where and when a role is enacted. This allows for a certain degree of creativity, but if carried to an extreme, will cause interference with other roles. Within a student services context, flexibility could refer to performing the role of advisor in the office, in the cafeteria, or at a student social. McKinney-Dhalenne (2000) expands this definition of "where and when" by suggesting that flexibility also includes the ability to enact a role in differing situational contexts. With respect to positional boundaries, flexibility also describes the ease with which the composition of a role may change and adapt.

Although Bruhn and Lewis (1992) discuss boundaries in the context of organizations, their characterization of boundaries on a continuum from impermeable, fluid, permeable to nonexistent has some similarities to the work of others in their claim that these characteristics can result in both confusion and creativity. Impermeable boundaries are antithetical to personal development and creativity, while a total lack of boundaries (at least as perceived by the individuals involved) can create great confusion, competitiveness, and ineffectiveness. Each type of boundary will need different strategies for management, whether the boundaries are personal or organizational. The most effective boundaries within organizations, according to Bruhn and Lewis, are strong (medium flexibility) but permeable. Petronio et al. (1998) refer to these important qualities as stability and permeability.

Hartmann (1991) draws together the concepts of permeability and flexibility and adds the notion of stability in relation to self-boundaries. As mentioned earlier,

Ernst Hartmann, a professor of psychiatry at Tufts University Faculty of Medicine, describes boundaries as a dimension of personality defining a degree of connectedness or separateness from others. Boundaries of the mind, according to Hartmann, can range on a continuum from extremely thick to extremely thin. Hartmann found that the concept of boundaries as part of personal management issues resonated with many clients, providing a description of aspects of their life that no other measure explained, and enabling them to address change to their boundary width in areas that caused difficulty. In that context, a discussion of boundaries has served as a useful tool in clinical practice.

Based on his work with dreams and nightmares, Hartmann (1991) developed a boundary questionnaire that measures boundary thickness or thinness. This continuum appears to expand the concept of permeability in the context of allowing the penetration of personal boundaries by the actions, ideas, or emotions of others. As such, it seems most appropriate for application to this study.

Follow-up studies by others support Hartmann's theory that boundary width is a useful concept for describing the nature of boundaries and does not duplicate other established tools such as the Meyers-Briggs Indicator (Barbuto & Plummer, 1998; Goode, 1992), or the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Hartmann, 1991). A review of *Dissertation Abstracts International* indicates that Hartmann's Boundary Questionnaire (HBQ) has been used in several reported doctoral studies in a variety of fields. These include a study of artists (Beal, 1989) and college student religious groups (Kennedy, 1992). McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) also draws on Hartmann to support her study of boundary maintenance tactics used in helping professions. All of these studies help verify the usefulness of Hartmann's typology in describing the thickness and thinness of personal boundaries within members of groups.

Although Hartmann (1991) discusses a variety of boundary types relating to consciousness, memory, thoughts and feelings, and dreaming, it is his discussion of boundaries in relation to group behaviour and careers that applies to this study. Thickness brings stability and the ability to focus on one thing and to keep other things out. Thicker boundaries bring a definite sense of personal space and of self. A person with very thick boundaries often identities strongly with groups, and adjusts personal behavior to fit group norms. People with thin boundaries may well join groups, but tend to react more to individuals, and may be critical of the group norms. Thinness brings with it more openness, sensitivity to thought and feelings, fewer defensive mechanisms, and a higher level of personal interconnectedness. Individual boundary thickness or thinness could, therefore, affect the approach and productivity of an individual in a collaborative situation. According to Hartmann, "[p]eople with thick boundaries are usually happier in jobs that are well structured, with clear lines of responsibility, whereas people with thin boundaries are better satisfied in looser, less well-structured settings" (p. 220). Hartmann cautions that it is impossible to absolutely categorize any group by a single boundary measure. He suggests that most effective groups will have a mixture of boundary thickness among members. Both Hartmann and McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) state that, although self-boundaries are somewhat fixed personality traits, boundaries can change with awareness, experience, and environment. McKinney-Dhalenne further argues that a knowledge of self-boundary characteristics helps individuals apply those characteristics in a conscious and tactical manner and that individuals thus "have a choice in the extent to which they connect with, or distance themselves from, others " (p. 20). Hartmann has a similar view in that he suggests that knowledge of boundaries can help individuals address problems within a clinical situation. Petronio et al. (1998) suggest

that the "boundary metaphor can help us to understand how people interact and communicate with others" (p. 581).

Based on this information, it was reasonable to assume that personal boundaries can impact collaborative practice and that the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) could provide some interesting insights into the nature of successful student services practice. Although this study of the boundary characteristics of student services practitioners did not relate specific collaborative tactics to the characteristics of personal boundaries, it did raise interesting questions about the importance and impact of boundary characteristics within collaborative situations.

Boundary strategies and tactics.

Boundary tactics are specific actions taken by an individual or organization on or along boundaries, generally for the purpose of building, defending, or permeating a boundary. Boundary strategies on the other hand, involve a conscious process and plan with specific goals. Halley (1997) uses the term boundary "tools" (p. 163) to describe the actions used to create greater or less fragmentation or cohesion in specific situations. This implies a continuum, an approach to describing tactics that is consistent with other studies.

A study by Bacharach et al. (2000) examines specific boundary tactics used by peer support providers in their organizational work with colleagues experiencing difficulties. They define boundary management as the use of tactical devices that are dynamic and emergent. Their study resulted in the development of a typology that is based on a continuum of four tactics ranging from tacit condition setting (e.g., a low key, passive initiative such as a note expressing concern), to warning (e.g., direct

confrontation, indicating that the individual's problem is obvious to others), to avoiding (e.g., not providing support until the peer makes a commitment to improvement), and through to sanctioning (e.g., direct confrontation or threat to the boundary of the peer). These tactics range from mild, or minimalist, to strong, or maximalist, approaches depending on the degree of confrontation used by the support provider during the relationship. Bacharach et al. indicate that the tactics chosen depended on how far along a continuum of complete separation to complete enmeshment the provider was willing to move with the peer needing support. Tactics that encourage greater involvement also create greater risk for the provider.

Ashforth et al. (2000) discuss boundary tactics as necessary tools for managing role transitions. Their study involved primarily personal role transitions such as those from work to home. The results indicate that individuals develop scripts or schemas as tactics for managing individual role transitions. Scripts and schemas are behaviours or actions taken to make otherwise difficult transitions more routine, a concept that could be applied to organizations as well as individuals. They discuss boundary transitions on a continuum of high, medium, or low magnitude, depending on the degree of difference and rigidity between the role being left and the one being entered.

Several studies on collaborative practice indicate that the particular tactics chosen for any interaction will depend upon the culture along the boundary. Ashforth et al. (2000) identify three factors that contribute to the choice of tactic. What happens on the boundary, they say, depends upon the particular personal role identification of the participants, on the clarity and rules for a specific situation, and on the culture surrounding the situation. In a study of collaborative practice of teachers, da Costa and Riordan (1997) identify that trust and efficacy levels have an

effect on the collaborative process. Higher levels of trust and efficacy encourage teachers to a higher level of risk in sharing "ideas on more sensitive topics" (p. 5), and thereby enable them to better address more difficult and complex problems. Liedtka et al. (1998) likewise identified trust as a major factor in effective collaborations and added the importance of shared values and personal engagement as contributing to success. Bacharach at al. (2000) found similar factors important, identifying that the individual's personal experience, confidence, and knowledge affect the degree of involvement. As well, they found that individuals with stronger networks of support were likely to use stronger tactics with others. Combinations of these factors were also found in other studies and literature on collaboration (e.g., Cambiano, 2000; Chagnon, 1997; Friend and Cook, 2000; Mankin, Cohen, and Bikson, 1996; Mostert, 1998). Although it appears likely that student services practice involves the use of many of the tactics and factors identified here, there was no research to confirm this prior to this study.

Boundary interactions.

In our day-to-day experience, organizational and personal boundaries are often the location of "highly charged contact" (Halley, 1997, p. 151). Boundary establishment and control are part of the power issues in any organization and the phenomenon of guarding boundaries against intrusion or change is familiar to anyone who has worked in an organization (Bruhn & Lewis, 1992). Boundary interactions can be used to "foster greater segmentation or integration" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p.11) between roles. Support providers, such as student services practitioners, must be adept at both breaking down boundaries and enforcing

boundaries in a "balancing act between inclusion and separation" (Bacharach et al., 2000, p. 706).

The labels used to describe boundary interactions, like those in other boundary concepts, vary from discipline to discipline, and create problems for understanding. The term tactics is generally applied to specific actions. Boundary interactions then, become descriptions of the purpose for the tactics being used.

The terms that emerge most frequently from the literature are spanning and crossing interactions. Boundary spanning arises from the organization context and has as its purpose the effective management of relationships on the periphery of functional areas or organizations in an effort to bridge differences (Halley, 1997). More commonly in recent literature, spanning is seen as a way of enhancing partnership initiatives and identifying important institutional issues and opportunities (Schroeder, 1998). Boundary spanning "requires us to leave the comfort, predictability, and security provided by our organizational boundaries and venture into uncharted, unexplored, and untested terrain" (p. 142), thus requiring some significant degree of risk-taking.

Boundary crossing is another frequently discussed concept. Boundary crossing implies a level of activity beyond interaction, where an individual or organization takes purposeful action within an area understood to belong to another. Most often, this is seen as an invasion of territory (Trost, 2000; Wilson et al., 1998). Within the health, counselling, psychology, and educational literature, the concept of boundary crossing is often identified as an ethical issue. Much of the literature refers to proper training of individuals in maintaining appropriate boundaries between the professional and the client (Owen, 1997; Webb, 1997). The central concern among the helping professions is the danger of over-involvement with a client, potentially or

actually leading to an act of abuse (Stufft, 1990). The Alberta Association of Registered Nurses (1998) distinguishes boundary crossings that may be acceptable, from boundary violations that are not. The concept behind this distinction is valid, applicable to student services professionals as well as others working within an educational institution where staff have a duty of care to students.

More recently, literature in health care and public education encourages a new look at boundary crossing within the context of collaboration. An interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to client management, through crossing of positional boundaries, is becoming established as a valid and effective approach (Friend & Cook, 2000; Liedtka et al., 1998; Hermansson, 1997; Hartmann, 1997; Mostert, 1998). Hermansson presents a view of boundary crossing as an approach to empathic understanding, and as a tool that effective counsellors need to use to some degree. Rist (1992) encourages activities that will "transcend artificial agency and professional boundaries" (p. 12) to bring a multidisciplinary approach to student services practice. Other writers do not use the label "boundary crossing" but still identify the importance of boundary flexibility. Yonge and Molzahn (2000) found that outstanding nurses frequently "pushed" against traditional limits and boundaries and that their professional boundaries were "governed by the context of the situation and not by existing rules and policies" (p. 20).

Crossing traditional boundaries can be risky and threatening. Mintzberg et al. (1996) refer to "the hard work of crossing boundaries" (p. 2). They call for a break from the hierarchical and market orientation that dominates organizations today and for an increased use of integrative and synergistic processes to establish strong collaborations. They identify that people create new knowledge when they "work together on real problems" (p. 4).

The more traditional views of boundary crossing imply that boundaries are contiguous and that it is impossible to cross out of one's own boundary without crossing into the "territory" of another. Some of the recent research, and my own understanding, suggest that this is not true. As a result, there has been much effort in recent research to describe boundary interactions through the use of new terminology. This is true in organizational studies such as Collazo-Baker's (2000) that use terms such as communication, cooperation, contracting, and coordination to describe boundary interactions.

Despite the range of definitions, there is general agreement among researchers that boundary work is not easy. The task of working and interacting along boundaries requires individuals to "recognize and confront their biases and suppositions of one another" (Engstrom & Tinto, 2000, p. 436). Bruffee (1987) identifies this as a re-acculturation process that can be painful and difficult. Engstrom and Tinto suggest that this process requires that "boundaries become permeable and even reconstructed" (p. 436) and provide support to Bruffee's contention that the process is demanding and requires new skills.

Positional Boundaries

Most of the theory related to the concept of position descriptions and boundaries originates in organizational literature related to human resource management. The term "job" is frequently used in the literature as equivalent to "position." The term position, however, is used here because it is more common in the educational and professional contexts that inform this study.

Whatever the term, the concept is deeply embedded in our understanding of the world of work. Positions are advertised, offered, filled, evaluated, and eliminated.

Union contracts rely on the concept for the description of many conditions and benefits of work. Position descriptions are often provided by the organization. In the new work environment, however, traditional positional boundaries are being challenged by the growing use of cross-functional, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary collaborative teaming (Williams, 1999). Bridges (1994) advances the most extreme view on position descriptions in his visionary work *JobShift.* He envisions a world that is "dejobbed" with a migration away from fixed functions to a concentration on the work that needs doing.

> Jobs are artificial units superimposed on this field. They are patches of responsibility that together, are supposed to cover the work that needs to be done. His job is to take care of this, hers is to take care of that, and yours is to take care of the other thing. Together you usually get the work done, though there are always scraps and pieces of work that don't quite fall into anyone's job description, and over time job responsibilities have to be adjusted and new jobs added to keep getting everything done. (Bridges, 1994a, p. 2)

This description does work well as a description of student services work, where each individual position has described work, but where many of the issues and challenges that need to be addressed actually fall outside any particular position description. In reality, college student services practitioners still work within an environment that is position based. Bridges' (1994) vision may be coming closer to actual practice in the business world and particularly in the technology sector, but it is still a long way from being descriptive of colleges in Alberta. Bridges' idea that positions need to be flexible relates directly to the fact that positional flexibility is often a fundamental factor in finding the best solutions for students. The ability to work along and outside position descriptions is an important skill for student services practitioners.

The above quote from Bridges (1994) reinforces a concept mentioned in the section on boundary interactions, which is important to this study. Position

descriptions are not contiguous and there are unassigned spaces between them similar to Bridges' "scraps and pieces" (p. 2). Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) suggest that extraneous tasks are often handled by employees who have the skills, confidence, and perception to shift the boundaries of their position and "craft different jobs for themselves within the context of defined jobs" (p. 181). The ideas of these writers help advance the concept of trans-positional spaces by supporting the idea of the constant existence of tasks and issues that are external to positional boundaries.

Terms and Images

Throughout this chapter, the issue of terminology has arisen as an issue for student services practice and in the discussions about collaboration and boundaries. This section highlights some of those issues.

As earlier indicated, the need to collaborate and integrate student services practice with classroom based initiatives is well stated in the literature. Keeling (2001) indicates that a common vocabulary is key to this integration. Kuh's (1996) notion of a seamless environment envisions an institution in which student learning and student development are viewed in a holistic manner and where the goal is to merge the two in an atmosphere of "educationally purposeful activities, events and experiences" (p. 135). While the language of student development theories has generally encompassed the more holistic meaning, the combined terminology has become more common in the literature and, more particularly, is used in this thesis.

Kuh (1996) also identifies the need for common terminology to help practitioners communicate the purpose of their work to others. In his article calling for the development of seamless learning environments, he states that

> A common language must be developed to create and communicate what is to be accomplished (i.e., the shared vision), to discuss what factors contribute to student learning, to examine the mental models productively, and to view all this from the "big picture" or systemic frame of reference. (Kuh, 1996, p. 139)

The plethora of terminology related to both collaboration and to boundary theory creates a significant problem of understanding. "Collaboration" and "boundary" themselves have multiple meanings as illustrated in the work by Collazo-Baker (2000), Friend and Cook (2000), Halley (1995), McKinney-Dhalenne (1999), and Mostert (1998). Most of these authors tried to find some common ground in the morass of definitions, but often ended up developing and defining specific terms for their own studies. This also is true for this study.

This issue of past and present meaning of words is a constant problem not only in student services, but is a basic topic of discussion within much of the writing about qualitative research (Silverman, 2000, p. 823). The added importance of terminology in this study comes from the difficulty of explaining the practice to others and the subsequent need for language that will assist in that effort. In the terminology used within the study, I use, as much as possible, the vocabularies of the participants where it would contribute to this goal of clear, consistent, and common language. This is in keeping with the goal of the study to reflect the voice of practitioners. When there was a need to reflect a concept in terms that would be more generally understandable, however, appropriate labels and terms were drawn from other areas and disciplines. Where no existing term fit, new terms were developed.

Toward a Model of Student Services Practice

To provide direction to this study and to assist in understanding the application of boundary concepts to student service practice, I have proposed a process model (Figure 1) that is representative of the general flow of day-to-day practices. It is risky to reduce a complex process into sections or stages. Recognizing the complexity of student services practice, I believe that a model can still inform our understanding of the processes that occur in collaborative action. Weick (1999) reflects my goal for this approach in his comment that "[h]umans are sufficiently complex and sufficiently malleable that any theory to explain their behavior has a grain of truth" (p. 784).

The model (Figure 1) reflects an action research approach. Although action research has been noted as a suitable paradigm for student services work, this study does not pursue that approach. Instead, the intent of the model is to add to the understanding of what constitutes the process of student services and where collaborative practice fits within that process.

This preliminary model (Figure 1) has five major sections or phases. In practice, these phases are not always differentiated as illustrated in the model, but often blur together, re-cycle, and re-occur. Still, a model is useful as a framework to explain the process that these exemplary practitioners might use in approaching issues.

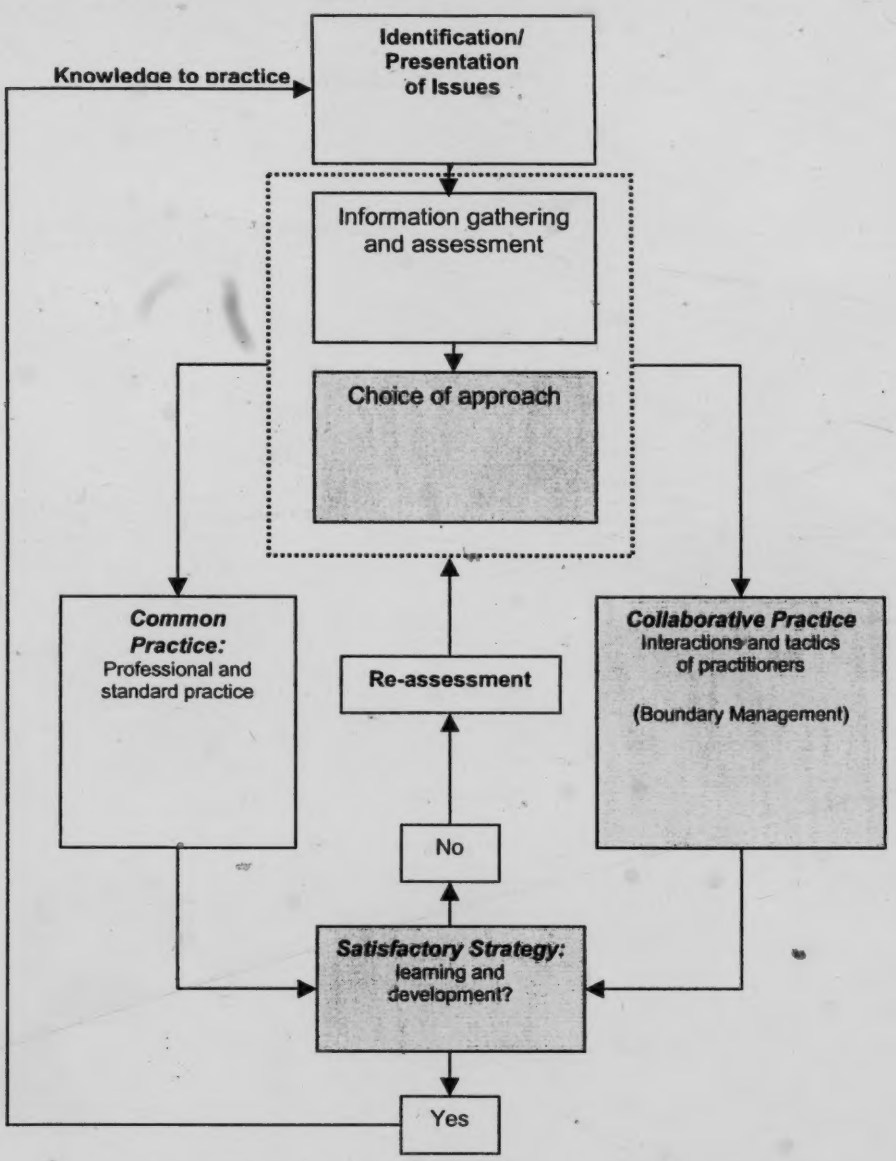
The identification of issues is generally a first phase, although it is often part of a cycle. Issues may arise from a variety of situations, but are often identified by students. Having gathered information, the practitioner makes a decision about how to proceed with the issue. The choices here are labeled as "Common Practice" and

"Collaborative Practice," reflective of the distinctions drawn earlier in this paper. Both approaches are useful and can be effective.

The final stage of assessing the satisfaction of results may occur in a variety of formal and informal ways. The process may need to recycle in order to achieve the desired results.

This study focuses on three processes within the model. These are the decision process (Choice of approach), the collaborative process (Collaborative practice), and the results assessment (Satisfactory strategy).

Figure 1: A preliminary model of practice in college student services



Summary

This study draws on the research and literature from student services practice, from collaborative practice, and from boundary theory. This chapter draws together these threads as they relate to the work of exemplary student services practitioners in Alberta colleges.

The chapter begins by providing a background to student services theory and practice, an introduction to the criteria of exemplary practice, and advances the notion that collaboration is essential to good practice. The student services literature reviewed here includes a consistent call for an approach to practice that is essentially collaborative. It is, therefore, logical to examine that aspect of practice within the work of outstanding practitioners. To examine the nature of collaboration, however, it has been necessary to draw on the literature from other disciplines to fill gaps in existing literature about college student services.

Based on the research available, it is possible to speculate that boundary factors, such as boundary characteristics, boundary tactics, and boundary interactions are interdependent and interrelated in the decisions people make about working on their positional boundaries. Specifically, it appears that the tactics chosen by the participants in their collaborative work are related to the nature of the boundary interaction, and to the characteristics of those boundaries. This conclusion is supported by several other studies (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2000; da Costa and Riordan, 1997; Yonge and Molzahn, 2000).

The chapter identifies the concern expressed within the student services literature that a common language is needed to develop shared understandings within a collaborative undertaking.

The literature review also identifies that student services practice is not well understood outside the field. In the same way, there is a lack of understanding of the actual processes used within the field. To assist in understanding the application of boundary management concepts to student service practice, and to help direct the study, a process model was developed (Figure 1).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Purpose

The intent of this qualitative study is to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and practices of outstanding practitioners in two-year colleges, as they work and learn within collaborative situations. The study examines how practitioners combine individuality and teamwork as they interact along the boundaries of their positions with a variety of individuals to encourage learning and development in college students.

Choice of Approach

My choice to examine the experiences of the practitioner is best explained by the words of James Rhatigan, student services historian and Vice President at Wichita State University, who wrote

> Our field grew from the campus up, not from theory down. Our history must be developed in the same way. It should include an examination of men and women from individual campuses, their encounters with the profound dramas of individual lives in their time, the joys and sorrows they experienced, their political and ethical encounters, and the lessons they learned and conveyed. The intent of student affairs has always been to connect people who need with people who care.... The many ways this happens provide the story of student affairs. (Barr et al., 2000, p. 4)

College practitioners have a wealth of knowledge gained through practice. Practitioners operate in Schön's (1995) "swampy lowlands" (p. 27) where problems are messy and confusing, but of critical importance. "We should think about practice as a setting not only for the application of

knowledge, but for its generation" (p. 29). This study endeavours to uncover some of this type of knowledge, which currently may go unshared.

The choice of positional boundaries as the focus arises from the context in which these practitioners work. Alberta's colleges are primarily structured in a hierarchical manner with people occupying "positions" that have "descriptions." These descriptions provide a context for the experiences of practitioners and therefore are essential to the interpretation of those experiences.

Research Orientation

This is an interpretive study that attempts to understand and reflect the experiences of the participants in a way that is both meaningful and useful. A qualitative orientation is fairly unusual within the student services research now available. Much of the early research work in student services is dominated by a conventional positivist tradition (Kuh, Whitt, & Shedd, 1987; Kuh, 1993). The literature abounds with research on characteristics of students, successful models of programming, needs assessment tools, program evaluation and intervention strategies, developmental goal-setting, behaviour control programs, and strategic leadership practices (Davis & Liddell, 1997, p. 27). Davis and Liddell in their analysis of articles in the *Journal of College Student Development*, the major research publication in the field, identified 44 funded studies in the years 1987 to 1995 of which only three were qualitative.

Stage (1992) argues for more flexibility in research about college students and for more qualitative research to give a fuller and more useful picture of the diversity of student life. She suggests case study, ethnography, observation,

document analysis, and focus groups. Writing in 1987, Kuh, Whitt, and Shedd were anticipating an upcoming paradigmatic shift moving student services research away from a conventional, positivist view. They describe student services work in the emerging paradigm as perspectival, complex, diverse, heterachic, holonomic, indeterminate, mutually shaping, and morphogenetic (p. 14). Such characteristics would have a profound effect on how student services practice would evolve. They saw naturalistic inquiry as necessary to richer and more fruitful understandings of both students and the practice.

The qualitative research completed in the 1990s was not plentiful, but was significant. Recent initiatives include descriptions of the student experience (Jorgensen-Earp & Staton, 1993), stories from students about the services they receive (Seymour, 1995), stories from outstanding student services administrators (Clement & Rickard, 1992; Sandeen, 2000), examples of reflective practice and transformative approaches (Brown, Podolske, Kohles, & Sonnenberg, 1992), and stories of students' out-of-class experiential learning (Kuh, 1993, 1995). Love (1995) reviewed the research related to student outcomes and discovered extensive work on the influence of faculty and peers on outcomes (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), but little work on the direct influence of student services practitioners. Love suggested a framework to explore the impact of practitioners on student learning, but there remains a regrettable lack of studies of practitioners themselves.

An interpretive approach is appropriate to the goal of this study, which is to develop descriptions of the complex interactions, both inter-positional and inter-personal, that are nested in a variety of organizational relationships between and among student services practitioners, faculty, administrators, students, parents, and

many others. The study focuses on the practitioners' understanding and description of the interactions that occur on the boundaries of their positions. The interpretive approach has been used successfully in research on collaborative practice in both K-12 education (Craig, 1992; da Costa & Riordan, 1997; Kluczny, 1998; Riordan, 1996) and nursing (Perry, 1994; Yonge & Molzahn, 1996) to reflect the experiences of practitioners in those fields. The approach is, therefore, appropriate to this study.

Situating the Researcher

Like many others in my field, I initially viewed student development as a linear process such as that described in the work of early theorists like Chickering (1969) and Perry (1999/1968). The change in my viewpoint came, not as a result of study of new theories, but from simple observation of and listening to students and the discovery that they seldom did what the theory predicted. Getting involved with students and colleagues, and thus gaining access to their multiple perspectives, brought a richness, flexibility, and diversity to my practice.

My current belief is that knowledge is situational and that knowing is both an individual experience and a collective accomplishment. Although the practitioners I interviewed brought multiple meanings and interpretations to their experiences, I believe that I was able to identify some shared understandings and collective practices among them related to certain aspects of their work. "Knowledge is always mediated by preexisting ideas and values" and yet somehow "human communities in practice have created reasonably firm grounds" (Seale, 1999, p. 4). It was within a context of multiple understanding that I sought to describe as fully as possible, what the participants saw as "true." Within the context of Schön's (1995) epistemology of practice, I sought to uncover the knowledge embedded in the work of outstanding

practitioners. A naturalistic and interpretive approach enabled me to examine the subjective and contextual understandings that practitioners had about their experiences.

I believe that human development is not always linear or patterned, and that the practitioners are often faced with unpredictable and idiosyncratic behaviour. Thus, the interventions and actions of the practitioner may not always have predictable impacts on the development and learning of students. Despite these vagaries, it is possible to provide an environment that generally supports positive learning and development for college students.

As a qualitative researcher, I was seeking an insider's point of view and I was "not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The research process and results were shaped by my personal history, which includes 18 years of work in student services within the two-year college environment in Alberta. The student services community in the province is a small one. As a result, I knew something about each participant in the study, and had long and respectful relationships with some. I believe that this strengthened the study.

Fontana and Frey (2000) describe the steps needed to establish effective interview settings. My acquaintance with the selected participants of this study enhanced my ability to be effective in the important steps of gaining access; understanding the culture, terminology and processes; identifying the participants; and gaining trust and rapport. The interviews were productive and open from the beginning. I was able to concentrate on the content of the interview, not the context and the terminology.

On the other hand, my personal experiences in the field have been overwhelmingly positive and primarily collaborative so I was alert to countervailing

experiences. At the time of data collection, I had been away from the field for about 18 months. With the advantage of both distance and time to review new research in the field, I believe that I have been able to understand the experiences shared with me and have described those experiences in a way that reflects an appreciation for the viewpoint and experiences of these practitioners. I brought to this research the "inside understanding" and "empathic identification" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192) that enabled me to interpret and reflect the meanings within the experiences of the participants.

Participant Selection

The approach of this study was to purposefully identify participants. Love (1995) warns that researchers in student services need to select participants carefully, specifically because of the eclectic nature of the profession. He provides six possible discriminatory methods to ensure that the process for participant selection produces defensible results. Two of these factors were used in this study. Participants were selected based on the amount of their direct interaction with students. Institutional type—the two-year college—was also used as a selection factor. Applying these two factors, participants in the study were selected from outstanding practitioners at two-year colleges in Alberta. Institutional size was not used as a distinguishing factor as it would leave too few potential participants.

Within those two parameters, participants were selected from among the recipients of an award presented to exemplary student services practitioners at the annual Alberta Services for Students Conference. The criteria for the award are established by Alberta student services practitioners and leaders, and therefore serve as a definition of exemplary practice in Alberta colleges. For the period of 1990

to 2001 there are 23 award recipients. Of the 23 names, 13 met the criteria of working or having worked in a two-year college. Three of the 13 were unavailable to participate. Eight of the remaining 10 potential respondents agreed to participate. The small number participants necessitated the careful handling of demographic data to protect confidentiality. Only aggregate information about the group is provided.

Six were front-line practitioners, or had worked directly with students for most of their career. Four of the eight were or had been mid-level or senior supervisors of a student services unit, but also had extensive front-line experience with frequent and daily interaction with students. The group included five females and three males. In addition to receiving provincial recognition for their work, each of the participants had received recognition as excellent practitioners in other ways during their career.

Participants were asked to quantify their experience in roles that they self-defined as student services. The responses indicated that the length of experience ranged from 8 years to 28 years. In total, the participants' experience in student services was over 150 years. The group worked or had worked in five different two-year institutions. Their experience also included work at two universities. Geographically, their work covered a broad area of the province in both urban and rural areas.

The group held an eclectic variety of positions during their student services careers, thus providing input from a wide range of services supporting students. Areas of experience included student financial aid and awards, academic advising, career counselling, personal counselling, job placement services, health services, registrar's office, orientation planning, student housing functions, high school recruitment and liaison, student life/activities coordination (including student

government and cultural centres), reception desk services, administrative assistance, and project coordination. In addition, some participants had significant amounts of classroom instruction time. This list encompasses most of the functions normally considered to be student services functions in Alberta colleges. Other areas sometimes part of a student services unit but missing from this study are cost recovery centres such as daycare, cafeteria, and bookstore. Another significant area not included is the function of the chaplain.

It is important to identify that I was the recipient of the 1997 outstanding service award in Alberta. My perspective has had significant impact on the design and results of the study. Steps taken to mitigate the impact of my personal predisposition are described in the trustworthiness section of this document.

Data Collection

Qualitative research is primarily about talking, listening and observing (Whitt, 1991). For this study, initial data were collected on audiotape, primarily through talking and listening during semi-structured interviews, guided conversation, and open dialogue with participants. Participants were asked to recount their experiences, and to reflect on the collaborative aspects of those experiences. Van Manen (1997) indicates that the interview process "needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place" (p. 66). An outline of areas for exploration was used to guide the reflective portion of the interview (Appendix A). Initial interviews were followed up as needed with other contacts and conversations for the purpose of understanding and verifying concepts.

Potential participants were individually contacted by email or telephone, followed by a letter of explanation and invitation to participate. The letter also served

as a consent document (Appendix B). All initial interviews were conducted in person, in a location convenient for the participant. Locations included participant's offices and homes. The interviews were one and a half to two hours long. I personally transcribed the tapes as soon as possible after each interview.

I kept a reflective log of personal observations and insights throughout the study. The record, kept initially on tape, on pieces of paper, on restaurant napkins, on the backs of cheques, and occasionally in a notebook, served to record ideas about the research process itself, concerns arising from the actual interviews, initial ideas about emergent themes, as well as any surprises or epiphanies. This log proved valuable several times through the process.

The Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (HBQ) (Hartmann, 1991) was used only to provide aggregate information about the group. Participants were asked to complete and score the questionnaire on their own. The HBQ consists of 145 statements, each followed by a 5-point response scale with a range from 0 (no, not at all, not at all true of me) to 4 (yes, definitely, definitely true of me). One third of the statements address boundary thickness. Two-thirds address boundary thinness. Results can be analyzed into categories descriptive of the various boundaries of the mind identified by Hartmann. These categories are then aggregated into a SumBound total that is descriptive of the overall boundary thickness or thinness of the individual.

The questionnaire was drawn directly and completely from *Boundaries in the Mind: A New Psychology of Personality* (Hartmann, 1991, pp. 80-95). All participants completed the questionnaire. Although participants were able to identify their personal scores on the various parts of the questionnaire, only the resulting SumBound score was submitted to me. These assessments were used only in

aggregate form as part of the general description of the boundary characteristics of the group. The SumBound scores were aggregated for two reasons. First, this helped to maintain the level of confidentiality for participants. Second, the number of participants was too small to make the individual scores meaningful in relation to the other research data. As there was no intent in the study to relate individual scores to the specific responses of each participant, the aggregation made sense. Further study would be needed to confirm the significance of the boundary score in relation to individual practice.

None of the participants were familiar with the HBQ (Hartmann, 1991) prior to the research. All were offered the option of receiving brief information about the questionnaire and the work of Hartmann after they had completed and scored the form. Several expressed an interest in finding out more about boundary characteristics and the potential of using the questionnaire in their own work with others.

Data Analysis

Analysis Process

I approached the examination of the data from a thematic analysis framework as presented by Stauss and Corbin (1990). This approach "produces findings not arrived at...by means of quantification" (p. 17), but by interpretation of data to produce themes.

The study used both inductive and deductive analyses. I first approached the data inductively, following the five-phase process described by Janesick (2000). The

first phase was a period of immersion in the data. During this time, I transcribed the taped interviews, re-read the transcripts, and listened again to the tapes. Janesick also identifies that immersion in the setting as important. In my case, this immersion was the result of my past experience within student services. The second phase was a period of incubation during which I thought about what I had heard and tried to gain some understanding and insight about how to approach the data. The third phase, beginning while I was coding data, was that of illumination, when I began to see patterns and strands of meaning. Janesick's fourth phase is explication, which involved the writing and descriptive stages of the study. The final phase of creative synthesis was not particularly creative, but was certainly a synthesis process. Although Janesick appears to perceive these phases as sequential, my experiences were more recursive, with illuminations and "ah-ha" moments coming throughout the research process. The inductive phase of the analysis culminated with the descriptions of collaborative practice within student services that are presented in Sections Two and Three of Chapter Four.

A deductive process was used during the application of boundary management theory to the data. These two phases were not distinct and were recursive rather than sequential. The decision to approach the data in two different ways was formed during the immersion and incubation phases as I realized the need to both reflect the understandings of the practitioners and to describe their activities through the framework of boundary theory.

The deductive process is one in which the researcher hypothesizes possible and potential frameworks, and then goes "back to the data or field situation and look[s] for evidence to support, refute, or modify that hypothesis" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.148). An initial review of research and literature related to collaboration and

boundary management revealed the frequent use of the descriptive continuum. Although there was no research directly related to positional boundaries, the continuum concept appeared across several studies and seemed appropriate as a "mini-framework" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 113). The open coded data were then interrogated against this framework. The results of this deductive process are presented in Section One of Chapter Four.

I did not relate any of the data back to demographic factors such as age, gender, or experience. Although these factors may have an influence on specific responses, this study was not designed to identify such relationships.

The Research Log

I began the research log during the development of the research proposal, but the significant entries began after the first interview and the initial reading of the interview transcripts. The research log was an integral part of the data analysis. It helped in the development of coding terms and of broader themes of analysis. I was able to go back to it to follow the changes in my thinking. It was the place where I found my questions and comments about the relationship between what I was hearing and what I had read earlier in the literature and it was where I found the notes that directed my search for new ideas in the literature.

Open Coding

The first level of analysis involved a holistic, inductive review of the content of the transcripts looking for "heuristically sound bits of data" (Stage, 1992, p. 101). Descriptive coding started with these bits of text. The open coding phase was a

circular, not linear, process. About half way through the coding of the second transcript, I found that my coding terms had changed from descriptive nouns to verbs. Upon reflection, I felt that the use of verbs made more sense because at this stage I was looking at actions and activities.

During open coding, I also made extensive notes in my research log. Berg (1989) suggests that this noting process is important to do as "a comment in the document triggers ideas" (p. 237) and that these notes are important later on in the process.

Axial Coding

Once the open coding was complete, I looked for themes that had emerged throughout the process and for new themes that might not have been yet identified. Data were sorted and examined, and in some cases, recoded and re-sorted. Again the process was circular, until several themes that reveal patterned and interconnected comments and insights, first within and then across transcripts, emerged consistently and strongly.

Selective Coding

The data were examined in two ways. First, they were examined in relation to the themes presented in the literature and, second, with respect to the concepts embedded in the research questions. This stage was a combination of logical and intuitive thought. Both inductive and deductive analysis were used. A decision was made at this time to continue with certain themes that seemed to have the highest

level of saturation of data and to, reluctantly, leave behind some tantalizing, but tangential bits of data that would require much further data collection.

As a final step, I returned to the data by rereading the original transcripts to identify negative cases and to satisfy myself that I had reflected as truly as possible the wisdom that had been shared with me.

Trustworthiness

The results of this study should serve as a useful reflection of the lived experiences of the participants, interpreted in a way that provides insight for others who work with students. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four classic criteria of trustworthiness are appropriate criteria for this study. Concern for credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability, was threaded throughout the process.

Credibility refers to the researcher's authentic interpretations of the data and is normally established by member checking for truthfulness and honest reflection of their personal experience. During the development of the research questions, the areas of exploration were discussed with two student services colleagues who were not part of the study. Using a conversational interview approach allowed significant opportunity for participants to raise issues of concern or interest to them. Selected member checks were conducted on some of the emergent themes through telephone discussions with participants. The findings that were to be presented in Chapter Four were then provided in draft form to all participants. This was followed by personal discussions with three participants and email discussions with all others. This process resulted in further stories, in the elaboration of the themes, and in suggestions for further metaphors. One participant requested a specific wording

change to clarify the meaning in one quote. As a final step, I sent a draft of Chapter Six to all participants and asked for their final comments. I received personal or emailed responses from all except one participant. The responses were uniformly positive.

Confirmability refers to the recognition and confrontation of the researcher's assumptions and biases. Although there was no intent to provide value-free results, several activities were undertaken to confront bias issues. First, the research log was used to record not only thoughts but also feelings experienced during my interactions with participants. These notes helped me to interrogate my conclusions. My own student services experience had been very collaborative and very positive. I was therefore on the lookout for experiences that were different from mine. I tried to remain as self-reflective as possible and hope that I have reflected as truly as possible the experiences of the participants. Interaction with my research auditor also required me to explain and justify my thinking. Discussions with my supervisor and my auditor identified that I had missed the coding of two very obvious themes basic to student services practice. "Sometimes the most obvious things are the hardest to see because they are right in front of our eyes" (Janesick, 2000, p. 392).

Transferability within qualitative studies is difficult to achieve. The intent of this study was to reflect the wisdom and experience of exceptional student services practitioners in two-year colleges in Alberta through the framework of boundary management theory. It is likely that study results of other groups in other locales will differ. The descriptions of context and process should enable other researchers to identify similar contexts in which results might apply.

Dependability refers to the likelihood of a particular research strategy yielding consistent results in similar situations. Detailed descriptions of the participant

selection process and the research process will assist repeatability. Detailed records concerning coding, the research log, and drafts of chapters and models are available. The provision of the refined model (Figure 2) of student services practice that guided the research questions should also increase trustworthiness. Finally, the audit process outlined below serves to increase both confirmability and dependability.

Audit Process

The auditor was a doctoral student with significant experience as a qualitative researcher and with a background in teaching. The audit process was used at three stages in the analysis process. Initially the auditor read the proposal and raised questions about methodology and approach that resulted in important clarifications in my thinking.

During the open coding process, another audit was done. Once I had coded some of the text, I chose random selections from each interview and created a separate coding chart, which the auditor then completed. I provided the auditor with the coding terms that I had used, but the auditor chose to do the coding without reference to the terms provided. I then compared the auditor's terms against my own for the same text passages. I found a very high degree of similarity in the coding terms. Where there was discrepancy, I went back to the passage and tried to identify why there was a difference. In several cases, I found that the difference was in the specificity of the term.

Once the findings section was drafted, I met with the auditor for a two-hour session. In this session, we reviewed the process from the data collection stage through to the finding stage, using samples from each stage. This process required

me to explain and defend my thinking throughout and resulted in the clarification of terminology and a change in presentation format. The auditor then took the materials to review, and returned them with additional questions and comments.

Janesick (2000) describes a concept of crystallization as an approach to trustworthiness in qualitative research design and results. Crystals come in a variety of shapes, substances, dimensions, and angles. "What we see when we view a crystal depends on how we view it, how we hold it up to the light" (p. 392). This study has used a crystal approach to picture a part of student services practice that may look different from other angles.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary.

I personally transcribed the audio taped responses.

Responses quoted within the text of this study were identified with different names to preserve confidentiality for participants, parents, students, and other staff who may have been involved in the experiences described. References to gender and geography were removed or adjusted. In some cases, references to the professional context were also adjusted. Aggregate descriptions of the group, where possible to provide, were carefully worded to avoid identification.

Due to the small community of practitioners, and to the purposeful selection of participants from a publicly available list of 13 people, it is difficult to totally preserve confidentiality. The possibility of identification was clarified with participants before they agreed to be part of the study. None expressed concern about this eventuality. Further complicating the issue of confidentiality is the fact that there are fewer than 20 two-year institutions in the province of Alberta, a relatively small

number. There has been no attempt to relate any results back to the practices of any particular college or practitioner.

Participants signed an informed consent document and understood that they could withdraw for any reason at any time, until the point that data analysis was complete. None did so. Because participants were being asked to present their individual experiences, it was not necessary to gain permission from any institution.

The Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) has been published in several places. According to the author, it is available for use without specific permission (personal communication, April 25, 2001). The questionnaire results were sent to me in a pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelope so that I could not identify the source of any of the responses.

Assumptions

A basic assumption of this study was that the participants are competent professionals in the particular area in which they perform their day-to-day work. The research depended upon the assumption that they actually used collaborative strategies in their work. This assumption proved to be correct although the amount of collaborative practice varied widely.

The data collection and analysis methods chosen were based on an assumption that interpretive inquiry would be flexible enough to allow me to explore and develop and adjust the study as seemed appropriate throughout the process. I assumed that I would be able to gain some insight into how participants perceive and confer meaning on their experiences.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

There are five limitations to this study. First, the purposive approach to participant selection means that a small number of individuals were potential participants. The perspectives of many outstanding practitioners have been excluded. Second, my personal involvement in the student services practice may have resulted in an overly favourable portrayal of the perceptions of these participants about student learning and development. Third, the study depended on responses drawn from memory, which may well have been distorted or changed by time. Fourth, the study depended on what the participants were willing to share about significant experiences. Fifth, this study reduces the experience of these practitioners to words on a page, and so may not adequately reflect the passion and enthusiasm that the respondents have for their work with students.

There are six intentional delimitations used to narrow this study. First, the study does not look at leadership practices, even though the importance of collaborative skills in leadership is well documented in the literature. Second, the study was intentionally limited to those practices involving successful collaboration, which forms only a small piece of the staff experience and does not reflect a full picture of the challenges and complexities of the work. Although the findings do partially address problematic interactions in collaboration, the results on this issue are not complete. The study is a preliminary and narrow picture of the practice of student services in Alberta colleges. Third, the study was restricted to two-year colleges that have educational missions quite different from those of universities. This may be seen to limit the applicability of the results. I believe, however, that the study did identify some strategies that are universal to the practice. Further research would need to be done in this regard. Fourth, the study was limited to participants

who had been identified as exceptionally good in their practice. The literature in the field suggests that collaboration is not as prevalent in practice as it is in theory. Thus, I took an intentional risk of missing data about collaborative practice by assuming that it is primarily a characteristic of exceptional practitioners. Fifth, the study concentrated on individual boundary strategies and tactics, thereby bracketing the factors of organizational culture, participant personality, and student success. The previous literature review indicates that these can be significant factors in collaborative practice. Sixth, the study did not relate responses to factors such as participant age, gender, or location. These factors may have an impact on collaborative practice. However, the intent of this study was to present collective wisdom.

Summary

This study takes a qualitative interpretive approach to the examination of the collaborative practices of exemplary student services practitioners in two-year colleges in Alberta. This approach is consistent with my own beliefs and orientation about the creation of knowledge as both an individual and collective practice resulting in multiple understandings. I believe that there is a significant amount of shared understanding about the purpose and processes of student services practice. It is those shared understandings that are the focus of this study.

Data were collected through conversational interviews with selected exemplary practitioners. Both inductive and deductive analyses were used to assess and code the data collected. The analysis process was informed by a detailed research log, and by returning to the participants for verification and expansion of specific findings. Trustworthiness was enhanced through an audit process and a

constant interrogation of my assumptions. The results are presented in three different sections in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore student services practice through an examination of the collaborative experiences of selected exemplary practitioners in two-year colleges in Alberta. Specifically, the study examines how these practitioners work within, along, and outside the boundaries of their positions. The focus is on those interpositional interactions that occur during collaborative endeavours. The results of conversational interviews with eight participants are presented here. The goal of the study is to give voice to the experience and wisdom of exceptional practitioners and to further reflect that experience and wisdom within a framework of boundary management theory.

This chapter presents the research findings in three sections. The first section presents the findings of the study as examined through the lens of boundary theory. This section of findings is the result of the deductive process described in the methodology chapter. The findings use boundary management concepts as drawn from the literature to interpret the boundary activities and experiences of the study participants. The findings are focused on three aspects of boundary management theory: (a) boundary characteristics, (b) boundary tactics, and (c) boundary interactions.

The second section of this chapter reflects participants' perceptions related to student services practice as interpreted through an inductive analysis process. Whereas the first section examines collaboration using a boundary management theory framework, the second section provides descriptive themes related to collaborative activities as the participants recounted them. The section presents the understandings of participants with respect to the role of collaboration within student

services practice. Those understandings are followed by the participants' perceptions on fundamental factors that support or constrain collaborative initiatives. The final topic in this section reflects participants' perceptions surrounding student learning and development.

Section three of this chapter presents findings related to the terminology and images of collaboration as described by some of the participants in this study. Three metaphors emerged as useful in representing participant understandings of collaborative student services practice.

Section One: Boundary Management

The literature review for this study suggests that emerging boundary management theories could be useful tools in the examination of collaborative practice in student services. This suggestion was enhanced during the conversational interviews with participants. Although all participants had a common knowledge of the concept of boundaries and were familiar with terms like boundary spanning and crossing, they had little or no exposure to the use of boundary management theory. The response was uniformly one of interest and curiosity. All participants completed the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire. (Hartmann, 1991). Several speculated on the thickness or thinness of their own boundaries, and what that might mean to their collaborative practice.

This study focused on the concept of boundary management, defined as a conscious minding of those activities occurring when positional boundaries are intentionally blurred, permeated, or crossed. Within this context, the data collection and analysis narrowed the concentration to three aspects of boundary. A deductive analysis process was used to look at the participants' descriptions of their work in

order to draw forth the meanings in relation to boundary characteristics, tactics, and interactions.

Boundary Characteristics

The literature review for this study attempts to define a manageable approach to the very complex notion of boundaries in order to develop a sense of how an understanding of positional boundaries might assist in successful collaboration. Based on this literature, the study began by looking at the self-boundaries of the participants. This was done with an initial assessment of the overall thickness and thinness of their boundaries. The concept of thickness and thinness of self-boundaries is the only way in which this study assesses the characteristics of the boundaries of self. The other characteristics are drawn from the perceptions of the practitioners with respect to positional boundaries.

Strong Personal Boundaries

The personal boundary characteristics of study participants were measured with the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991). The results indicate that this group of respondents have strong personal boundaries. The overall totals (SumBound) results on the HBQ ranged from 233 to 268. In the initial study of 866 participants, Hartmann (1991) identified a mean score of 273 plus or minus 52 (p. 67). He classified extreme thinness as above 351 and extreme thickness as below 195. Thus, the boundaries of the participants in the present study are consistently thick, consistently below (thicker than) the mean score identified by Hartmann, but not in the extreme range. Yet, solid personal boundaries did not prevent these

practitioners managing their self-boundaries for effective collaborative practice. This finding was a surprise in view of the initial presentation in the literature review and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

The concepts of flexibility and permeability are also found in research related to boundaries of self. Although the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) has the potential of measuring specific aspects of personal boundaries, those aspects of the self-boundaries of participants were not addressed in this study.

Flexible Positional Boundaries

The participants have a personal and professional orientation to their work that supports both individual and collaborative approaches requiring a high level of flexibility. Flexibility of boundaries refers to the ability and willingness to change or adapt the content of the position and to take on different roles in a variety of times, spaces, or situations.

The participants did their job at a variety of times outside the normal workday. Gerry recalls working with a student who had lost a parent, and going into the office at night when it was closed. "I had rented this little film, and we were sitting on my office floor, the student and I, watching this film on dying..." (Gerry, Lines 6450-6451).

Participants spoke of enacting their normal role in different spaces. For these participants, the usual "space" was within an office. Yet, many spoke of working in a variety of other locations that may be seen by the student as less intimidating: at a cafeteria table, in a quiet hallway, or in the student residence. Only one participant expressed discomfort with this idea of working in other places, indicating that, except

for emergencies, "You announce that your services are available, but you don't go out and seek work. The work comes to you" (Brett, Line 286).

Participants exhibit role flexibility while involved in collaborative situations by accepting a task or role that was not normally part of their position, usually on a temporary basis. For example, the leadership role in any situation may depend on which participant has the best relationship with the student, not the person who may have the authority. "So that sometimes we would say, 'OK the ball's in your court,' and the rest of us took a more minor role than we would have if we had not been collaborating" (Gerry, Lines 6356-6357).

> That would usually happen because of particular issues...where some part of it is determined to be more somebody's responsibility than others, or a perception that maybe it is another's greater responsibility or it's my greater responsibility to see that it happens. So that, though a number of us are involved, somebody has to make sure that Step A happens. Somebody always does. (Kelly, Lines 1301-1305)

Permeable Positional Boundaries

Whereas flexibility implies a boundary change that affects the usual composition of the positional role, permeability, as used in this study, refers to the ease with which a person can exit a role or move across and between various roles. It also includes the ability to resist any movement of others into the boundaries of a position. In a collaborative situation, the permeability of a boundary would make it easy or difficult for an individual to move out of a defined positional role into a less clearly structured role. Participants spoke of "moving into the area" (Dallas, Line 441) of another role that needed to be done and wasn't being done. In speaking of positional boundaries, Robin indicates that "sometimes the arena [of my job] would get bigger" (Line 7081). These practitioners appear to move easily into whatever role

was appropriate for the situation. They may have a leadership role as a result of their position, but once they have moved into a collaborative situation, they may no longer play that role. Brett describes a student services unit where practitioners worked in an environment where there was "global permission" (Brett, Line 660) to cross boundaries into collaborative situations, suggesting that boundary permeability was a positive quality.

It is important to note here, as elsewhere, that the permeability of positional boundaries does not imply that these practitioners crossed ethical boundaries. Nor did they attempt to do the work of another professional. Their boundary permeability is accompanied by strong boundary perceptiveness about the importance of boundary maintenance issues.

Boundary Perceptiveness

As earlier identified, the approach of considering positional boundaries as transitional spaces that provide thresholds for action and interaction also brings with it a sense of ambiguity about where the boundary actually is. Participant responses in this study indicate that they can work within this ambiguity and are very perceptive about boundary issues. This perceptiveness includes recognition of the role and nature of boundaries for themselves, their colleagues, students, and the organization.

Awareness of their own boundaries enables these practitioners to identify when they are stretching or exiting their own positional boundary areas. They consider boundaries to be very important and make the decision to engage in boundary activity based on the potential benefit to the student. They are aware of the rules surrounding the boundaries of colleagues. They are able to balance the

necessary maintenance of their positional boundaries with the need for boundary adjustment and change. Most of the respondents had experienced significant boundary change in their positions, through institutional re-organization and through their own developing expertise and networks.

> Well, I think, my job I guess, when it first started, because it was new to the college, it wasn't really clearly defined, but I had a vision of what I thought [it] should be, and that was really the classroom, student, instructor relationship, but sometimes the arena would get bigger…I would always be trying to, in my mind as I talked to a student, try to keep it focused on the student/ instructor/ classroom/ college relationship and not on the issues that may be causing some of these things and that was where I always tried to draw the line. But I don't think it was clear. Because I think, sometimes, you consciously went beyond, depending on the situation. And sometimes it depended on the relationship you had with the student. (Robin, Lines 7079-7095)

There is agreement among these practitioners of the need for, and importance of, boundaries and the potential dangers associated with ignoring boundaries. They recognize that trying to do the professional work of others is neither appropriate nor ethical. They have a clear perception of the difference between appropriate boundaries and when boundaries become a barrier to success. Outstanding practitioners have an understanding of the boundary rules surrounding their own practice and that of others. They understand the boundary culture within their unit and their college. They know when and when not to stretch boundaries. Although they spoke of knowing when to "draw the line" and "not step on toes," they also talked of situations where they found it necessary to push their boundaries. Most often, these situations occurred around issues of fairness for students.

Each participant spoke of the importance of confidentiality in handling student information, using terms such as "crucial" and "sacrosanct" to describe the trust they held. All could describe the difficulty of the decisions they sometimes had to make

with reference to sharing sensitive and confidential information. Yet all recognize the importance of the sharing of high level information in certain situations.

> In collaborating, it is information sharing that sometimes pushes the boundaries of confidentiality. But, doing it in the best interest of the student, and in some cases, doing it in the best interests of the greater community…and, it has to be rational. (Alex, Lines 5236-5238)

> A person who pushes their boundaries, and is a "best practice" person, is the person who has a sense of formal and informal leadership within the institution, places of where to grow an idea and work with an area, and in other areas to leave it alone. Because sometimes if you just ask the question, you get an answer and you don't want that answer. You go to the place where you get the right answer and then you work with it there. And what issue to bring someone else along on, who may not necessarily be part of the trust network, but you know that on this particular issue they will be fine. Yes, just to be able to survive and function, they [student services practitioners] have to know that in a way that others don't. (Dallas, Lines 4464-4472)

Boundaries as Transitional Spaces

Each participant had special knowledge and expertise that formed the core of her or his positional role. In a common practice approach, they would primarily be working on their own with a particular issue. At the boundary of their position, however, their knowledge and expertise became less unique and more integrated with the knowledge and expertise of others to form a space of transitional knowledge. In practical terms this meant that everyone had enough knowledge of the expertise of others to provide a service to students that could be described in business terms as "one-stop shopping." Practitioners need to know enough about the total practice "to make a transition for the student that seems seamless to the student" (Dallas, Line 4146). Brett agrees with this notion, saying that everyone

needs enough transitional knowledge so that if someone is not available, "others can step in and provide at least the core services from other areas" (Lines 55-56).

Trans-positional Spaces

In the literature review, I presented a preliminary definition of trans-positional spaces as descriptive of the place where complex, multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary issues can be addressed. This term was not used during the interviews, but participants did show an understanding that positional boundaries are seldom, if ever, contiguous, leaving "spaces" where collective expertise is needed. The size, shape, and content of the shared space may change with organizational and staff changes, but it always exists in human service functions similar to student services. All participants understand the phenomenon of the "grey zones" and they share a clear understanding that issues are often better addressed in the "grey zones" outside positional boundaries.

Although terms like grey areas and grey zones were used frequently, they also used terminology such as the "10% of the 110%," the "fuzzy area," and the "undefined areas." This area becomes a "new" space where there may be "four or five different people in the mix, all helping this one individual as a team, which came together, coalesced, and created this one sort of single entity of service. We used the team to help the person get through" (Brett, Lines 103-104). The new space is an area for shared responsibility and action.

Participants identified that many student issues span a wide range of professional specialties and thus fall outside the realm of any particular positional boundary. Although each practitioner may be able to address part of an issue, strategic approaches to such issues are best developed together in the shared

spaces that exist between job descriptions. It is in these areas that the big picture or collective vision can assist in improved strategies. These outstanding practitioners accepted the need to work collaboratively in shared spaces for the best results, even though working in those spaces was often difficult.

> I was thinking about boundaries, and the idea of moving into areas that are undefined. An example I have…I saw a need for some [function removed by researcher]…at the [college], and it fell in no one's area. This was not a responsibility. And it was very interesting how to stick handle your way through a bureaucracy without having someone throw up a roadblock here or there. Saying that is not your job, why are you doing this?…And I think to move into that area took a lot of personal energy and thought, about how do I do this without stepping on toes or what people perceive as their turf. And it was a motivation. I had a personal interest in it, which was my primary motivator; I saw that it was needed. It didn't fit my job description; it didn't fit anyone's job description. (Dallas, Lines 4434-4442)

Boundary Tactics

In the early stages of this study, I had anticipated that it would be possible to identify both strategies (careful plans) and tactics (actions used to accomplish an end). The data analysis, instead, seemed to indicate that these practitioners do not perceive, and did not describe, any sense of undertaking conscious strategies as they moved into collaborative situations. Their examples of strategies are instead related to the goals of student learning and development. Therefore, this section presents not strategies, but the specific tactics identified during the axial coding process of the data analysis.

Practitioners use a variety of tactics as they interact on their boundaries. I have used descriptive verbs to describe these various boundary activities used as an individual undertakes to build, consolidate, or evaluate a particular collaborative relationship.

Although the analysis suggests that tactics can be aggregated generally into thematic categories within a continuum, it is essential to note that both the categories and the continuum should be seen as flexible. These categories imply a continuum of action that would move the participant toward or away from a more intense level of boundary interaction. The resulting seven categories are stretching, initiating, testing, risking, consolidating, committing, and creating

Stretching

Stretching tactics are those that push against the accepted or defined limits of a job position. These actions are taken because they are consistent with the individual's perception of boundary fit. Participants talked about identifying and then doing things that needed to be done that were not necessarily part of any job description. Words like stepping forward, pushing, flexing, extending, feeling out, and adding were used to describe this type of activity. In describing a situation in which a retroactive change to curriculum requirements would have serious impact on some students, Dallas says, "I saw this as a fairness issue for the students. It wasn't my job, but I saw it as an issue that I had to take action on" (Line 4305).

Initiating

Initiating tactics include actions that are designed to begin tentative relationships with others and might include such activities as socializing, contacting, and offering. Participants mentioned a variety of common social approaches to making personal contacts, but with the specific intent of developing networks related to their positions. Such networks were seen as essential to the purpose of their role.

Included in this category are intentional actions such as calling a new person on the telephone, dropping by someone's office, inviting someone for coffee. Gerry states that "it took all different ways and times of reaching out. I used to get out and about deliberately, just to stop and chat and stick my head in an office to say hello and to see how things were going for that person" (Line 6064).

Testing

Testing tactics are those used to assess the potential of the relationship to move toward a deeper involvement and, at the same time, to anticipate the ramifications of that involvement. These tactics are used to evaluate potential trust levels. Participants spoke of sharing information to see what happens, of transferring students to very specific individuals to assess student reactions to the results, and of specifically asking for confidentiality but not getting it. Tactics may include such actions as offering, assessing, sharing basic information, and requesting assistance. Rene recalls that she frequently requested help from colleagues and that most often "the result was a quick response and an eagerness to help, to be part of the team working on the problem and finding a successful solution" (Line 2106).

Risk Taking

Risk taking tactics involve intentional activities that open an individual to criticism and betrayal. Tactics may include the sharing of medium level information, confiding, and confronting. Participants spoke of risking the respect and trust of students when they drew others into a confidential situation. Participants are aware that collaboration can always be risky for the individuals who participate. Risks

include having your ideas and concerns treated as irrelevant, having your intentions and goals preempted by others, or having shared information misused. The highest level of risk appears to be at the point where more sensitive information and ideas are about to be shared. "You reach a point where you are willing to take a risk. Once you share, you are sort of opening yourself up to criticism" (Robin, Lines 7325-7326).

The intentional use of confrontation served to raise an issue to a high level of awareness and was a highly risky tactic. Some participants see it as a necessary tactic when issues of basic fairness, consistence, and justice were involved. In such cases, " I wouldn't quit. It was risky, but I wouldn't quit until something was done to correct it" (Robin, Line 7495).

Consolidating

Consolidating tactics are those that strengthen connections to others. Consolidating tactics depend on the prior presence of such factors as trust, care, value, and self-confidence in the developing relationship. Participants mentioned that they intentionally followed up on positive results, with telephone calls or notes of thanks, and with other kinds of closure actions that would encourage further interaction. Tactics may include such actions as reciprocating, respecting, responding, celebrating, exchanging, and supporting. Alex identifies the power of the reciprocal exchange of information when "somebody cares enough about what you are doing, to come and tell you what they are doing" (Line 5197).

Committing

Committing tactics are those that are used within an environment where practitioners have a confidence that the conditions important to successful collaboration are present. Committing tactics are based on " a willingness to discuss, a willingness to share opinions without worrying that something is going to happen if I say the wrong thing" (Alex, Lines 5310-5311). This willingness to share "creates a line of openness, of being able to work on joint issues" (Dallas, Line 4329). Actions here include conceding, warning, respecting, and sharing confidential information.

Creating

The final category of creating tactics is the safe space where participants are fully engaged with one another with the intent to develop a synergistic atmosphere for problem solving. Individuals learn from one another; learn about the skills that others have that might be useful to the solution. This is the place at which participants indicated that improved collective strategies developed and a full engagement with others resulted in creative solutions. Participants spoke of "hashing out," "brainstorming," "focusing," and "coalescing." Specific tactics at this stage also include debating, questioning, listening, proposing, conceding, assigning, volunteering, adjusting, learning, and revealing. "We came together, coalesced and formed this sort of single entity" (Brett, Line 105).

Boundary Interaction Continuum

The boundary tactics described above can be aggregated into a continuum of interaction. Boundary interactions are described in the literature review as those

activities occurring along the boundaries of positions including such things as spanning, blurring, and crossing. The data analysis and aggregation from this study result in the identification of four types of boundary interactions. The seven categories of tactical activity were examined in relationship to one another, and then again aggregated into four types that describe the nature of an interaction. These four types can be seen as a loose continuum, reflective of how these practitioners managed their boundary relationships.

It is important to note that the categories and the continuum are not rigid, and that some of the tactics identified were used in all types of interactions. The boundary experiences of these practitioners are presented here in a topology of four types of interactions. I have labeled the interactions as (a) boundary extensions, (b) boundary conversations, (c) boundary connections, and (d) collaborative engagement. The choice of these labels is further discussed in Chapter Five.

Boundary Extensions

Boundary extensions are those activities where a practitioner may decide to bring a new activity into the boundary of their own job, often temporarily. Participants referred to this as "pushing" or "stretching" the boundaries, or "going the extra mile." These type of actions require a certain level of self-confidence. Dallas states that "there is the 'self' part of it and then there is the 'ability' because you can't move on beyond 'self' without your own confidence in the position and confidence that you have some support from supervisors or whoever it is" (Lines 4103-4105). Boundary perceptiveness is needed to assist the practitioner in assessing the boundary fit and determining that this activity is a legitimate one to add without creating a serious territorial issue.

Rules and procedures in relatively bureaucratic organizations like colleges are usually clear and well documented. Yet, when it came to collaboration, these practitioners often ignored, bent, stretched, or otherwise manipulated the rules to obtain the best solution for the student.

> And it may be that we know…that there is a procedure or maybe a policy, but if we can just get the job done…I guess I have been here long enough that I know that there's a lot of things that can be done far more effectively, if we pretend that the procedure /policy doesn't exist. (Kelly, Lines 1146-1148)

Successful boundary extensions builds further confidence, expands "big picture" knowledge, and helps prepare the practitioners for other types of boundary interactions. Boundary extending may not involve others at all. It is often the result of a strong commitment to student success. Gerry recalled some students who had been asked to leave residence. Although she supported the decision of the residence manager, she describes how she "went the extra mile."

> …and I can remember coming home and finding an old mattress and pots and pans for them, because they were going to quit, and so that was… you could say I was taken in, but they both graduated and I am sure they are leading good lives. (Gerry, Lines 6404-6406)

Boundary extending may also serve to enhance relationships with students.

> …but I guess… because your reputation is earned by everything that you do, it isn't just how you treat them when they come to see you, but if you are willing to be involved in other things. I think of helping students with the concession at the [event]. I had no interest in [event] whatsoever, but I had a little bit of expertise in throwing together a 'foody' kind of thing, so that you work with them to try to make that happen. And I think that in the end, you do build a relationship. Some of them last a lifetime. (Robin, Lines 7423-7428)

Boundary extensions occur in the transitional spaces along positional boundaries and may change the shape of the space, usually on a temporary basis.

Boundary Conversations: Initiating, Testing

Boundary conversations describe the actions participants took to contact and connect with others to build relationships that help establish a basis for future cooperation. Participants reflected that this is "out-of-office" work, often very informal, and sometimes in a social atmosphere. Information shared at this level is useful to the other, but not highly confidential. Again, confidence is required for the individual to take this step because a certain amount of risk is involved.

> It depends on how confident the individual feels. I think if that individual feels confident, it may be creating the connection. If they see the need to create the connection, they will create their own opportunities. That may be going to the person's office, or saying can I come to your department meeting and talk a little bit about what we are doing? So I think the person who has the confidence can go out and create that opportunity. (Dallas, Lines 4122-4127)

The tactical activities used during boundary conversations most often fall into the three categories described as initiating, testing, and assessing tactics. Robin describes initiating activity: "...the discussion would be informal, it would start out informal, and it would be a discussion between a few of us first, and then it would evolve" (Robin, Lines 7171-7172).

Gerry describes a testing and assessing situation.

> I would call and then send them to see someone, and they would come back and say "don't ever send me there again," or they would say "this is really working good," and I would know when and who to use next time. (Gerry, Lines 6136-6138)

Boundary conversations occur between the transitional spaces of different positional boundaries, establishing a temporary and loose connection between two or more positions.

Boundary Connections: Risking, Consolidating

Boundary connections are those interactions that require a higher level of trust and self-confidence and involve behaviours that are seen as more "risky." These risk-taking tactics serve the purpose of solidifying and consolidating the connections and relationships. This moves the individuals involved toward a higher level of commitment, and toward a deeper level of interaction. Individuals begin to share information that may be sensitive or confidential. They offer opinions on issues at a level of openness that would not normally occur. As such, this interaction has the highest level of risk. All participants spoke of the risks involved and that a betrayal of confidence during connection interactions is very damaging to future relationships.

> You risk them saying that the idea or the project isn't that meaningful, or not that important. Maybe your, what you think your strengths are, the gifts that you think that you bring to that task, that project, aren't as good as you think they are, aren't as worthy as you think they are. Risk, Um. I guess there is the risk of others taking credit. I have heard of it happening, but I haven't had it happen to me here. Or risk somebody else taking over in ways that change the task. So that the goal changes. (Kelly, Lines 1394-1399)

Like conversations, boundary connections occur between the transitional spaces that bound position descriptions. Unlike conversations, however, boundary connections have more permanence, allow an easy flow back and forth, and have the effect of increasing the permeability of a boundary. The communication level here is more of an ongoing dialogue than a conversation. It involves "making connections out" for the purpose of "talking to people about the bigger picture, the larger mandate" (Dallas, Lines 4077-4078).

Collaborative Engagement: Committing, Creating

As described in the literature review, engagement implies a responsive activity imbued with the ideals of sharing and reciprocity within an atmosphere of mutual respect. As such it is a useful description of the integration of interests and actions occurring at the most integrated level of collaboration.

Engagement is a process of sharing highly sensitive information, opinion, and expertise that result in a synergistic creating of new approaches to issue resolution. It demands a level of commitment beyond that of conversations or connections. At this level there is a shared responsibility for such things as confidentiality, performance, and quality of results. Betrayal during an engagement process is rare, but can have very serious consequences to the student.

> ...and that all developed with trust and with time...there had to be lots of trust, and with time as we saw that it worked together and had a bit of a cohesiveness, I guess, whether we were successful or not, but that we stayed being a team or a unit, and I think there was lots of openness to talk about issues and occasionally that would get rocked by revealing too much, someone disagreeing with the technique used, so sometimes we would have disagreements, and then it felt like, the other people who weren't so involved in that issue and would know a lot about building up the trust again, would be mediating between those professional people, which was an interesting thing. (Gerry, Lines 6494-6502)

> Pulling together all the thoughts from all the different areas and develop a collective action...I fit here...I'll do that...we will all work together on that. Sometimes I would gain information that was not part of my expertise, but it enhanced my ability to approach that area and make the transition for the student easier. (Dallas, Lines 4205-4209)

Collaborative engagements occur outside the boundaries of positions, in the trans-positional spaces identified earlier. The level of commitment here goes beyond that of the specific position. The level of understanding needs to be broader. Here in the trans-positional spaces, it is not about the function; it is "not about recreation. It is

about education, and about supporting that individual student" (Dallas, Lines 4079-4080) with the best possible follow-up strategy.

Section Two: Collaborative Practice in Student Services

Both current and past theory in student services suggests that collaborative practice is necessary in any approach to the goal of intentional and holistic student learning and development. Thus, it is logical to assume that collaboration will be a part of the practice of these participants.

This section of the findings reflects the participants' perceptions of collaborative practice as determined through a process of inductive analysis. As indicated in Chapter Three, this process involves the building of themes from the details. Whereas the first section of findings examined the collaborative experiences of the participants using boundary management theory, this section more directly reflects their understandings of collaborative practice.

In Chapter One, I present a definition of collaboration that narrows the confusing variety of uses in current literature. Collaboration is defined there as more than cooperation or coordination, but involving an integration of interests that creates a new synergy. The participants in this study, however, use a broader definition of collaboration. Included in their stories of collaborative practice are situations that reflect a continuum of interactions. They identify collaboration as including the simple exchange of information, cooperative efforts on the completion of a project, and ongoing informal interactions with colleagues. They also describe experiences where the interactions with others involve exchange of sensitive information, ideas, and opinions at a high level of trust and confidence. Often such exchanges are key to finding the most creative and collective strategies. Some level of risk taking is

necessary to all these types of interactions. In light of the intent of this study to reflect the voice of participants, I use the term collaboration throughout this chapter in the same broad sense used by the study participants.

Within this section, the findings are presented in three themes. The first theme presents the practitioners' understandings of the role of collaboration within student services practice. The second theme is a summary of participant reflections on the fundamental factors that support and constrain successful collaboration. The final theme reflects the participants' views about student learning and development.

Collaborative Practice in Student Services

Collaboration is Core to Good Practice

The participants in this study describe collaboration as one of the underlying principles of their work with students. They use a collaborative approach when students experience situations or issues that do not fall neatly within the boundaries of any particular position or expertise. Collaborative approaches are also used to address broader institutional issues. Kelly describes student services as having significant "grey zones."

> I think when it comes to student services, there are a lot of grey zones where you are not sure, it's not clearly defined as to whose responsibility is it? Or maybe its everybody's responsibility and so you could just refer, or you could just let those things in the grey zone go, or you could work together with others to make sure that a number of us are making sure that the grey stuff gets dealt with in some way. It is blurred, it really is blurred. (Kelly, Lines 1292-1298)

Collaboration is more than just important. Several participants identify that it is not only an underlying principle, but an essential feature of good student services

practice. Failure to use collaborative approaches could reduce the quality of the outcome for the student.

> Now I believe that there are centres that have established themselves in some organizations and they don't base it on a collaborative model. They base it on an isolationist model...that we are an entity unto ourselves. And I think that if you do that, whether its counselling or registrar's office or financial aid or whatever, then you are headed for disaster. Because the collaborative model is everything [in student services]. (Alex, Lines 5087- 5089)

The administrators in this study confirm the importance of collaboration as part of the theory and practice of student services, "because people in student services see, or should see, all that is going on in the institution" (Alex, Line 5067). Their "fundamental role is to understand the total organization...and if you don't understand the way an organization works, and I feel very strongly about this, within the context of a collaborative model, then you are not practicing student services" (Alex, Lines 5077-5080).

There is a wide difference in the amount of work time that these practitioners spent in collaborative situations, with estimates from 10% to 75%. The amount of time, however, is not a factor in the practitioner's assessment of the importance of collaboration. Instead, practitioners saw collaboration as an effective way to deal with situations and issues that cannot be adequately addressed within the bounds of their own position and expertise. It is an approach to service that does not leave the student feeling that he or she has been "handed off" again and again.

Practitioners use the term "referring" to describe the action they took to involve another practitioner in an issue. The process they invoke, however, is much more than the common meaning of the term. Emerging here is the idea that the traditional process of "referring" a student to the "proper" service is enhanced through collaboration to encompass the idea of "transferring." While referring implies

the sense of sending someone off to another agency, the idea of transfer implies a continued involvement of the practitioner with the original issue. The idea of transfer of the student through a shared responsibility model is designed to

> provide people with the sense that they are getting coordinated service. So it is not kind of approach where people say, "that's not my department, I can't help you, go away," or "have you tried so and so" and have people hopping around…you know, that phenomenon which you know is just too common. I find that intolerable. (Brett, Lines 59-62)

Collaboration Improves Practice

Respondents identified that collaboration results in benefits to their own practice, and to students. They specifically identify that collaboration can result in improved strategies, better decisions, greater efficiencies, increased wisdom, and greater creativity. Even though all those benefits are possible, finding an improved strategy for addressing student issues is seen as "the fundamental purpose for collaboration" (Alex, Line 5271). Working together enables a mixture of expertise, experience, and perspective to be brought to bear on an issue or problem. Other benefits mentioned are improved knowledge for future action, greater efficiency in handling issues, and greater effectiveness in the solution. The time spent in collaborative practice "just increase[s] your wisdom, so that, I don't know, so that you would be able to address it the next time with more wisdom" (Rene, Line 2170).

> Yes, definitely because each of those people that I mentioned and we have a counsellor, social worker and a nurse…they serve students based on their profession. And so we all have different skills that we bring. We may be working to solve the same problem but we come at it from a very different angle, with different experiences and different ideas and insights on what might work. (Kelly, Lines 1192-1197)

> And we changed our whole process sometimes, where if we had not collaborated, we would never have seen the big picture and seen how serious or poor the student situation actually was. Sometimes we

> didn't know that until we all got together and realized that the student was not eating, and by the time we consulted what everyone knew, we had a very different approach. (Gerry, Lines 6359-6364)

In addition, collaboration improves practice by increasing efficiency. Several participants mention that, without collaboration, several people may be hearing different stories from the same student and therefore working at cross-purposes. "By allowing this to happen you are wasting everyone's time. So [collaboration is needed] for the benefit of the learner, and also for the benefit of the professional staff because they are stretched to the nth degree. Collaborations are constructive" (Brett, Line 5262). Students seeking help do not necessarily provide the complete and accurate picture of their situation. Gerry provides one striking example of not having the full picture in the situation of a single parent who had lost an arm and was returning to college for retraining. Each staff member approached by this student was supportive, developing special services, and stretching the rules to provide on-campus housing. Yet, there were no collaborative discussions about the student until a complaint was filed with security about the student having guns in his unit. A check of the property uncovered "a house full of illegal guns" (Gerry, Line 6369). Subsequently, staff practiced some "tough love, rather than being over sympathetic!" (Gerry, Line 6370).

Collaboration is Student Centred

To suggest that these practitioners were student centred in their approaches is to state the obvious. Centring on students is systemic to good practice and as such is so interwoven into conversation that it did not initially emerge as a finding. This theme emerges in phrases like "enjoying students at their very worst" (Morgan, Line 3119), and in being "learner centred" (Brett, Line 599). It emerges in the values

placed upon student learning and development, and on the reward of responses from students, findings presented in other parts of this chapter. The importance of drawing this finding out is to highlight that the purpose of collaboration is not organizational efficiency or because it is the latest management fad, but because it improves strategies for students.

Collaboration is Part of a Seamless Practice

Participant descriptions of their work imply a seamless relationship between common practice and collaborative practice. Although collaboration is seen as core to practice, these practitioners also value work that they, and other practitioners, do within the boundaries of their own practice. Respondent stories of practice often segue from events occurring within their own offices to stories of collaborative practice, and back again, in a manner indicating that they use both as part of total practice. They do not see them as different approaches.

Their stories relate to both specific student issues and to generic institutional issues such as academic retention initiatives, bereavement issues, legal problems, abuse, addiction, healthy lifestyles, student leadership, cultural conflict, and communal living, all addressed through broad, collaborative programming initiatives. The many stories of practice can be generalized in a common telling. A student comes into the office with a seemingly straightforward request. While the practitioner works with the student on the request, it becomes clear that other issues are affecting possible solutions. The practitioner must be able to make a reasoned assessment of whether these other issues will hamper success for the student. The practitioner may then make a decision that this is an issue requiring a broader approach, and will "call on other members of the larger team to bring in other

expertise as necessary" (Brett, 76). The resulting strategy aims at alleviating the larger issues so that the student can effectively address the original issue. Individual student stories may also serve to alert practitioners to more generic and systemic institutional issues that need to be addressed.

This decision to bring others into the mix seems effortless, but may be the result of extensive experience. The responses to my questions about how collaboration works were often delivered in a polite, but a "that's a silly question" tone of voice. Answers were short and not very explanatory. "I had my network," declares Morgan (Line 3199). Robin states, "I just knew who to go to, who to trust" (Line 7200). "We have a very collaborative staff," (Line 2080) Rene says, as if that explained it all.

Collaboration Includes Reflection on Practice

The improvements in practice mentioned earlier as a benefit of collaboration often come from reflection and review. Participant stories of practice include an aspect of assessment and feedback that implied a constant process of reflection and learning. Group responses and discussion were identified as an important part of the collaborative process. Particularly because student services practitioners deal with some very tough and complex issues, there is reward in knowing that the best possible strategy has been used.

> We often had a team reward, where over the years we have had lots of laughs, and behind closed doors about things that we were successful with. I don't think we ever made fun of things we were not successful with…I mean it is interesting when you think about that, I mean we had lots of good laughs, about how, in dealing with some really tough issues, that it felt that it worked out in the possible scenario. We shared that. (Gerry, Lines 6342-6347)

Participants describe a personal process of constant self-assessment of their strategies that result in constant learning and development for themselves. Did it work for the student? Why didn't it? Why did I do that? What might have worked better? Did it move the student along toward her or his goal?

> I think at the end of a situation, I would sit back and I 'd say Why did I say that? If the same incident occurred again, I'd do it differently. I think I often, probably 99% of the incidents that I had to deal with, at the end I would say...I could have done it a little bit differently. I learned a lot! I learned a lot!!! But I would say Why did I say that yesterday? I could have said this. And I would kind of evaluate the situation and evaluate myself. (Morgan, Lines 3162-3166)

Sometimes responses take the form of actual debriefing sessions that are seen as valuable tools for both closure and feedback. These sessions are "an important part of the whole thing" (Gerry, Line 6515). All participants mention receiving feedback through visits, telephone calls, and notes from students and parents, often long after the issue has been resolved. Most often, evaluation is the result of a self-assessment that provides the satisfaction of knowing "that worked well...even if you said it to yourself" (Gerry, Line 6331). There is also the self-satisfaction of knowing that a very tough issue had been successfully resolved and "knowing that I provided excellence in service and I haven't failed, and I have done the best that I can personally do. And even more" (Brett, Line 541-542).

It is important to note that the participants also employ other kinds of evaluative feedback, including student surveys, performance reviews, and statistical information such as the graduation and employment rates that form part of the provincial key performance indicators. This feedback has limited value. "I know how many things go into those numbers...so many factors, so many people, so many environmental factors contribute to the bottom line. I would never look at those numbers and say I was successful or I wasn't successful" (Kelly, Lines 1487-1489).

Involving Other Groups

The practitioners understand that collaborative interactions with others are important to finding the best strategies. Practitioners spoke of working with a wide variety of individuals and organizations outside the boundaries of their particular administrative units. There is an attitude of "whoever is necessary," (Alex, Line 5229) which means that student services practitioners "need to know what is going on in the broader community. They need to know what the resources are and who might help" (Alex, Lines 5230-5231). Other groups mentioned as being part of specific initiatives include clergy, police, social workers, parents, security staff, medical staff, senior administrators, and community businesses and organizations. Students, student groups, and student advocates were also frequent members of a collaborative initiative.

Collaboration with Classroom-based Faculty

The key collaborative relationship mentioned both because of its potential and its problems is the relationship with classroom faculty. Participants view themselves and others in the institution as educators even though they do not work in a classroom. Alex best expresses this by suggesting that "it is very critical that every person that works at the college understands that they have a role in student learning. It is not just teachers in a classroom. We are all teachers and we are all role models" (Alex, Lines 5500-5502). It is not surprising that these participants feel that working with classroom faculty is an important part of their collaborative efforts. They were able to identify several instances of successful collaborative interactions with faculty. Dallas, reflecting that "I still don't think we are there yet. I think the literature

has it. But I don't think we are there" (Dallas, Line 4459), best voices the general consensus.

If student services practitioners want their role to be recognized and valued, there is a need for them to respect and value the role and authority of faculty and to recognize the importance of the related boundary issues.

> How can we work better with the academic side of the house? My notion of that is that you started out with the wrong question, by framing your questions incorrectly, because, as long as you start thinking about the academic "side" of the house and the student affairs "side" of the house, then you are probably not going to be collaborating. And if you started from the basis of what can we do as an institutional team to facilitate learning, then you start from a different perspective. Most people want to collaborate more with the academic 'side' of the house, but they didn't want to give up their student affairs 'silo' because they were threatened. And until you have the trust to do that, then the collaboration will only be minimal to average at best. (Alex, Lines 5445-5455)

Participants identify the need to take collaborative approaches to issues impacting the classroom by involving classroom faculty in the follow up communication, if not in the solution. If a faculty member refers a student, it is vital for the student services practitioner to have the full picture of how the issue is affecting the classroom and to share information with the faculty member early in the process.

> Always. Always we connect just to let them know for closure purposes, that the student has seen us and the issue is being resolved or has been resolved. It does two things. It provides closure for the faculty. It says to the faculty member, again, in terms of building a trust, that we can be trusted to do follow through, and also, quite frankly, it is the best advertising we can do. (Brett, Lines 477-480)

Failure to provide this feedback could lead to the impression that human problems can be dropped off like garbage at student services.

> I don't want people's problems to be viewed as human garbage that can be disposed of. There has to be ownership on the part of the teaching faculty members who hold a responsibility as an instructor,

> they need to be involved in the academic development of the student but they also need to be involved in the fact that this person is a human being. And you don't' just throw or dump problems, You don't' just get rid of them. You are somehow involved. And so by keeping them in the loop, you still give them some connection and closure on that issue. (Brett, Line 488)

Toward a Model of Student Services Practice

This study began with a proposed model of practice (Figure 1) that anticipated the process through which practitioners approached day-to-day work. The data analysis provided both confirmation and adjustment of the model. By drawing together the findings with respect to collaborative practice, the model presents the choices, actions, and tactics used. The study does not explore the common practice portion of the model and therefore no adjustments in that portion of the model are made. Instead, the study attempts to illuminate some of processes that outstanding student services practitioners use in their collaborative experiences.

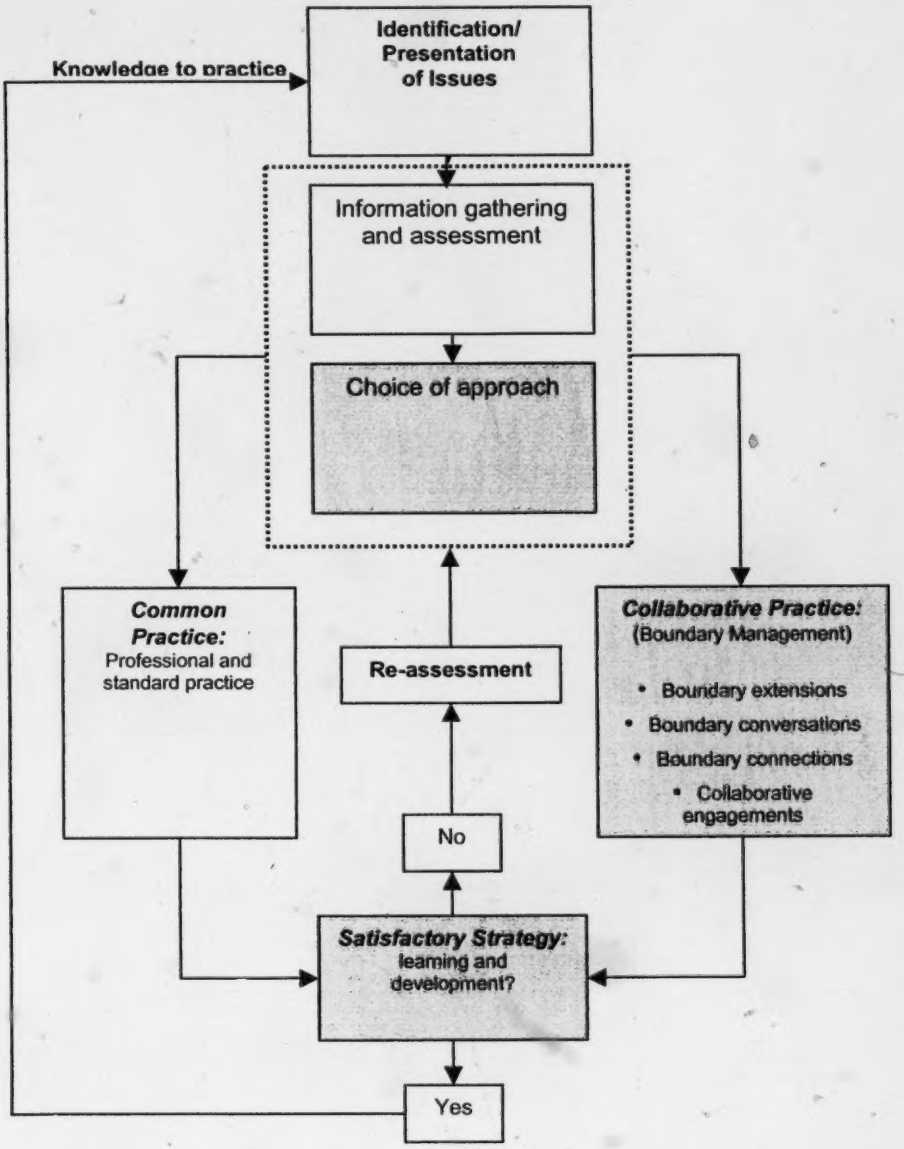
The study provides greater understanding concerning three key areas of the model. The study explores practitioners' choices, actions, and tactics during their collaborative experiences, their rationale for action, and the learning and development that occurred for both the practitioner and the student.

The refined model (Figure 2) retains the five major sections or phases. The study confirms that these phases are not as clearly differentiated in practice as the lines and boxes of the model may suggest. The process is often seamless and recursive. However, the general flow of action of the model is consistent with that described by the participants. Thus, the model is useful as a framework to explain the process that these exemplary practitioners use in approaching issues.

Study participants identified that issues may arise from various sources such as student self-identification, practitioner identification, community presentation, administrative concerns, institutional mission changes, or the results of research. During the information gathering and assessment phases, these practitioners use a variety of common skills and techniques such as listening and questioning. Having gathered information, the practitioner makes a choice about how to proceed with the issue. The approaches labeled as "Common Practice" and "Collaborative Practice" are reflective of the practices described by the participants. Both approaches are used and seen as effective in some situations.

For the participants, the final stage of assessing the satisfaction of results occurs in a variety of formal and informal ways, through feedback and reflection. Satisfactory results include student learning and development and improved practices.

Figure 2: A refined model of practice in college student services



Fundamentals of Collaboration

Threaded through the conversations with the participants are several themes related to what I have called fundamentals. These appear to be essential pre-conditions to any successful collaborative activities. This section first presents four factors that enhance collaboration and six underlying characteristics of the successful collaborative experiences of these practitioners. A final section presents several factors that were seen to inhibit collaboration.

Four Foundational Factors

These practitioners expect that all those involved in a collaborative situation will have certain basic qualities, regardless of the job position they occupy. Four factors emerged as basic requirements to the process of establishing collaborative relationships: trustworthiness, self-confidence, an ethic of care, and a commitment to valuing others. These are essential to successful collaborative work, in part because they lead to improved information sharing and mutual respect. These four concepts are also basic to student services practice, and are woven throughout all the conversations with all participants.

Trust.

Not surprisingly, the need for trust is basic to the discussions about collaboration. Participants talked about learning who they could trust, being able to trust, broken trust, and proceeding with trust. It was the most frequently mentioned of all factors.

> I think though, it becomes a trust issue and a competence issue. Trust...and there is the social trust between...or maybe it is a professional trust between the recreation person and the counsellor, or the recreation person and the academic individual. So somehow to bring those people together so they get contact and see a human interaction. But the other part also is a competency issue. If they don't feel competent in their own area, and aren't confident in their own realm, they can't make that next step. (Dallas, Lines 4081-4087)

Self-confidence.

As could be expected from their identification as outstanding practitioners, the respondents express a high level of self-confidence in their own abilities. They all feel that they are able to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Their level of self-confidence is such that they do not worry about not having all the answers and often rely on the expertise of others. They are confident in saying to a student "I have no expertise to deal with this" (Robin, Line 7103) and to talk to the student about a broader, collaborative approach to problem solving.

> I think there is a realization on all parts that we each have a role to play, I may not have the full answer, you may not have the answer, this person may not, but together we can kind of cover off and come up with solutions that would meet the end. I think that is a positive. That is really, um... that again reduces barriers. (Dallas, Line 4148)

> [I]f you are not defensive yourself, that is part of it. And I think it takes a fair bit of maturity, and I don't mean by age, but I mean comfort in your work place, or whatever, to reach a point to be able to take that risk and I guess it's, a confidence, maturity, being...I can't find the word, but its almost when you don't mind being criticized, I think you feel that by and large, you know how to make good decisions, and I don't know what the word is that I want there, but its almost that you recognize your value, you know that you are appreciated for some of that and that maybe builds your own self esteem to the point where you don't mind not knowing it all. (Robin, Lines 7321- 7327)

An ethic of care.

This concept is so ingrained within the practitioners and so much a part of my own student services experience, that it was almost missed in the analysis. As in many human service professions, student services practitioners operate in an environment of care and concern for others. While discussing situations that lead to collaboration, Robin indicates that "it's just caring, I guess. If you heard something and bells kind of went off, and you were concerned about that student, then it makes you go that extra mile, while others might dismiss it" (Robin, Lines 7223-7226).

Valuing Others.

All practitioners in this study acknowledge the importance of receiving input from those outside student services that have significant contact with students. Strategies are improved when the contributions of a variety of individuals are recognized and considered. "You never limited or undervalued what they had to say, because people like the night watchman have lots of contact with students that we did not during office hours" (Robin, Line 7220). It is important to "recognize their value. It may seem kind of simple, but you need to see the value in each cog of the wheel, and recognize their value. And that comes from interacting with them" (Robin, Line 7203).

Other Important Factors

Other factors mentioned less often but still considered important to good collaboration are shared understandings, good judgement, communication, and supportive leadership.

Shared understandings.

The work of these practitioners is centred on a shared belief in a holistic approach to student learning and the responsibility of everyone in the college to contribute to student learning. Involvement in activities, contact with faculty both in and out class, planned living environments, leadership, and humanitarian activities all contribute to student learning. Robin and Brett best express the shared understanding of their role.

> We are looking at the things they are learning outside the classroom. Probably weighing that almost equally with what they were learning inside the classroom, because if they are going to be successful in the workplace, they have to learn to deal with people. You can have all the academic background, but if you don't have the rest...you know, then you are not going to be successful. (Robin, Lines 7187-7193)

> We always try to bring it back to a focus on learning in the broad context, and helping students to learn. And recognizing that learning outside the classroom is as important as learning in the classroom and can be complementary at times. And in many ways is also foundational. In fact, the things the person learns outside the classroom are often part of the structure and foundation on which they build their classroom learning. (Brett, Lines 613-618)

Good judgement.

Practitioners use their judgement in the assessment of particular situations and issues that arise during their day-to-day work. For these experienced participants this judgement process seems to be an ingrained process, and one that appears to occur automatically. The process is a self-assessment of whether the particular practitioner has the tools to handle the situation, and then which other expertise could contribute.

> They could do the assessment and say that this person needs extra help or whatever...bring the counsellor in and then if things go OK, there is no downside to it. If things don't go OK, it's very easy to hand

> the whole thing off to a counsellor. Saying, this looks to me like an issue that is not really going down the advising road, the counsellor can kind of step in and take over, and resolve the other issues that are brewing, and then when things are back in the advising arena, to move it back to the arena. (Brett, Lines 88-94)

Communication.

All participants mentioned a willingness to communicate information at a level of confidence. This level of information exchange may strain the boundaries of confidentiality, but where judged essential to a successful outcome is seen by all participants to be key to the process.

Supportive leadership.

In a context where there is a tension between cooperation and competition, the role of leadership becomes even more crucial in the development of successful collaborative approaches. Although the organizational context has an impact, the participants speak also of a leadership responsibility for modeling and encouraging collaborative approaches. There is a need to "build a cohesive team where people don't feel like if they share the learner with another professional, then maybe their job won't be valued or their role won't be valued" (Alex, Lines 5118-5119). The leader needs to build trust and confidence levels actively among staff.

> Trust is very, very important thing. I guess the other thing too is just confidence that you can put a team together, to have the power. I try to do this with all my group, to empower them to know that they can be, to use a metaphor, the "contractor" and can put together this group of sub-trades and do the project, whatever the project happens to be, and that they are not limited, they don't have to come through me, they can go directly to the sources that they feel is required to address the service need of the client. (Brett, Lines 220-225)

Characteristics of Successful Collaborations

The discussions with participants about the process of collaboration reveal that several informal but essential rules are operative and assumed by the group involved. Six themes are presented here. These factors are not ranked according to importance, but they are presented in an order related to the number of times they were mentioned.

Purpose

The purpose of the collaboration is to determine the best strategies for the student, in a process that hears different viewpoints, assesses available information, forms options, develops logistics for actions, assesses results, and changes or realigns strategies as necessary.

> It improved our strategies because, in discussing it, each of them would either provide some information that I didn't have, like Oh did you know this, this? Or they would say, Well, I've tried this, this and this. Or they would question me. Why would you do this, when that's probably more critical right now? So it added perspective that I didn't have, because I don' t have those experiences or that training, or that information. So definitely, definitely, improved strategies. (Kelly, Lines 1198-1204)

Although the other benefits of collaboration mentioned earlier add value to the process, the purpose is always improved strategies for students.

Knowledge Sharing

Participants view the sharing of information as being vital to "looking after students correctly" and to ensure that an important part of the big picture was not missing. Several point out that a mistake often made by new practitioners is thinking that students are always forthcoming in the information they provide. Many

recounted stories of "being taken in" by students, as part of their experiential learning. An attitude of careful and reasoned information sharing is essential in developing the best strategy.

Often the kind of information shared at this level is not details about the student, but shared knowledge about how to handle a particular situation best. Expertise is shared about the best approaches, with practitioners learning from one another.

Collective Strategies

Strategies developed in the shared spaces are not "professional" strategies for the counsellors or advisors or job placement officers. They are collective strategies for addressing an issue. That is, there is no intent to tell instructors how they should teach, or to tell nurses how they should nurse. While these collective strategies are enacted, the professionals who may have been dealing with a specific issue continue to determine their own "in-office" approach to the situation. In some cases, that approach will be tempered, enhanced, or supported by the more collective strategies agreed upon. Because students do not compartmentalize their lives according to an organizational chart, they often discuss their issues with a variety of staff, even those who are not "experts." Understanding the collaborative strategy may help all staff to support the strategy the next time they have contact with the student. Conversely, a lack of understanding can interfere with the success of the strategy.

A Safe Space

The shared collaborative space is viewed by these participants as a place where they can share ideas without fear of being betrayed or dismissed, and where "we can bounce ideas around without being judged. We may be challenged, but not judged. Does that make sense?" (Kelly, Line 1186). There is a feeling of freedom with respect to expression of ideas. "I think we ended up feeling quite a lot of freedom, most of us, about speaking about a problem" (Gerry, Line 6493). This sense of safety is considered vital. This is illustrated throughout the study by constant participant references to trust, value, and caring.

Parity in an Eclectic Membership

The membership in any particular initiative is most frequently on a need and knowledge basis. In more complex situations, the group includes whoever could contribute to facilitating solutions and whoever has a productive connection to the student. The emphasis is not on authority or rank, but on the practitioner who had the most useful ideas. There is a parity of value not necessarily present outside the collaboration. This parity means that all contributions are respected although not necessarily part of the solution.

> You pull in whoever is necessary. What that means is that the circle of collaboration needs to be broader and that means that people in student services need to know what is going on out in the community. They need to know what the sources are, and who might be available to help. (Alex, Lines 5229-5231)

Informality

Collaboration is normally informal, although a formal meeting may be part of the process. Participants describe a variety of formats where dynamic interactions take place both formally and informally; where communication and consultation, not format, are key. "Collaboration is about relationships, not structure" (Alex, Line 5229). Many collaborative groups are short term, and membership is structured by the participants rather than the leadership.

Constraints to Successful Collaboration

Study participants understand that not all of their colleagues have an interest in working collaboratively, or may not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to do so. Although there is tolerance for those who are non-collaborative, there is also an expression of concern about the impact that isolationism has on the quality of solutions. All study participants had experiences with, and comments about, the barriers to collaborative practice. Many of these comments are the antithesis of those behaviours that relate to positive collaboration: lack of trust, care, validation, and confidence. Participants describe several other factors that can negatively affect the quality of the solutions in complex problems. These concerns, identified by several participants, are presented in seven themes. They are (a) power issues, (b) personal arrogance, (c) professional ethics used as an excuse, (d) "black and white" attitudes, (e) divergent values, (f) impact of budget cuts, and (g) unclear organizational messages.

Power Issues

Power issues are the most frequently mentioned. Participants all had contact with individuals who see information as power and are very territorial about their own positions. They perceive any attempt to get them to share their expertise or information with colleagues as a threat to their job and their value.

> Loss of control, loss of power, people if they are insecure, or maybe are fearful that by collaborating they are going to lose their own identity and their own what they have already been trying to do themselves and maybe some of your ideas may be kind of usurping where they were already headed. That is not comfortable for people and…yes, power issues. (Rene, Lines 2252-2256)

> But there is also a lot of learning and sharing that is necessary. And I know that there are people that don't share because they don't want what they know out there so that others can benefit from it. They keep this gem inside of them and it gives them a competitive edge. It also gives them a bit of power. If people know that they know something, or have got something…yes…that gives power. (Kelly, Lines 1406-1411)

Personal Arrogance

The term "personal arrogance" is used to describe some student services practitioners and other college staff who believe that their expertise is intellectually out of reach for a lay person, and that no one else can understand certain issues that students face. This lack of respect for the ability of those in other roles in student services, or in the college, prevents them from hearing the opinions and experiences of others.

> But some staff did not want to share their knowledge I guess. Or they did not want any input [from others] on how they were dealing with a particular student issue. And I guess that's a boundary issue. So in most cases those staff would have very definite boundaries around them. (Morgan, Lines 3398-3401)

> And so she had been an academic, and now she was administering a campus. Her comment was, when there wasn't going to be someone

> on site that she saw as a "peer' as an academic administrator, was that "... I am not going to a 'clerk' to get an answer!" That lack of recognition of our roles. And we have to explain...this is not 'clerk'. This person has a specialized knowledge, ...more specialized knowledge than perhaps a campus director would have in dealing with service delivery to the student. And if you can't go to that person, why? What is the barrier? And the barrier is that perception that we are talking about. (Dallas, Lines 4173-4181)

Professional Ethics Misused

All participants have a high regard for professional ethics as a guide to behaviour. They respect the professional and positional boundaries of others and do not cross those boundaries to attempt the work of other professionals. On the other hand, some described incidents where they believe ethical guidelines become a shield against involvement in a collective strategy, or as an excuse not to share knowledge.

> Sometimes it was their profession. They had very definite ideas of their professional wisdom, and they didn't want someone who wasn't [one of them] to have any knowledge of [their subject]. There wasn't any willingness to take suggestions, or thought on the matter from me. (Morgan, Lines 3414-3418)

"Black and White" Attitudes

Rigid, "black and white" attitudes toward organizational structure or the application of a particular theory or rule often inhibit collaborative solutions. If the first question is always "what is the rule?" rather than "what is the student to learn in this situation?" then the chances for creative solutions are lessened. The best practitioners, according to Dallas, are those who "are not tied tightly to a single stream of theory or thought, but are willing to get ideas from the situation and look at what the situation means to that particular student" (Dallas, Lines 4187-4188).

Divergent Values

Although these practitioners see collaboration with classroom faculty as key to a successful approach to issues not bounded within any particular job, they are aware that attitude, structures, and values of teaching faculty may be different from their own. Several mentioned that classroom faculty see them as "crying towels" for the student.

> And I think that a very ingrained belief system, especially in universities, but also in some of the different departments we have at the college, that students are here to get classroom knowledge and all this learning stuff and all this stuff about the whole person is a bunch of crap. And they say, go do that downtown, whether it is at Alberta Mental Health or the bar. That is not what we should be spending tax dollars on. (Alex, Lines 5560-5565)

Impact of Budget Cuts

While Alberta Learning has encouraged cooperation and collaboration among colleges, a period of tight budgets and budget cutbacks has had a contravening affect. Three results of the tightening budgets are identified as hampering collaborative practice.

First, all participants mentioned that staffing cutbacks contribute to an increase in workloads with the result that student services staff spend more time in their offices with clients, and classroom faculty spend more time in the classroom. This has meant less time for the crucial, informal connections that build relationships. One participant identifies this as a "hunkered down" attitude (Dallas, Line 4244).

Second, the increasing use of part-time staff in both instructional and service areas has made it difficult to establish and maintain the networks of trust needed for collaboration. Part-time staff members usually spend less time on campus and do

not have the same levels of involvement that full time staff have. Consequently, they may not always have a commitment to the institution or its vision that encourages a collaborative approach.

> In fact, part-time staff were much less willing to share. So I think they didn't see the student in their entirety. I think the full time staff...saw more of the student as a person, than a staff member who was only there part time. I had a much harder time in the later years, establishing rapport with those instructors. (Gerry, Lines 6170-6174)

A third factor, a perception shared by half of these participants, is an increasing attitude of personal competition. Budget reductions that result in staffing cuts at many institutions over the past several years lead to internal competition and increasing territorialism between departments and individuals. "People are protecting their turf, trying to pull in as much as they can, saying this is important to the institution and I'll hold on to it and they won't cut me off because I am here and do that" (Dallas, Lines 4243-4244). Alex comments that "some people figure that you should try to get as many marbles in your can as possible. But what you end up is a garbage can because the stuff that is in there doesn't belong there" (Alex, Lines 5145-5155).

Unsupportive and Unclear Organizational Messages

Most of the study participants recognize that they are fortunate to work, or to have worked, in atmospheres that value collaboration. They use terms like "team," "cohesive," "network," and "supportive" to describe their workplace in different institutions. Most of their colleagues are "student oriented, and wanted to be a part of a team in working at a problem and finding a successful solution" (Rene, Line 2117). Several participants could also describe having worked in atmospheres where collaboration was discouraged, where "nothing was shared, where we were not

allowed to talk to [certain groups of students]...and we were left in very awkward situations, where we didn't know who was on first anymore. It was a mess" (Morgan, Lines 3228-3231).

Several participants commented on the current contradictions between documents from Alberta Learning that encourage collaboration among colleges and what they see in their day-to-day practices. As presented in Chapter Two, the underlying concept of Campus Alberta is one of cooperation and seamlessness. At the time of these interviews, however, several participants perceive that there is strong competition for funding between colleges, creating a culture of competition that impacts attitudes at the level of the practitioner. This culture changes the way that institutions work with each other, in some cases, creating more competition.

> Within my industry, ... there is some competition now that there wasn't in the beginning. We are reporting our stats, and so the ideas that we have, we keep just for our own, and we are not too big on helping others. Correction, some aren't too big on helping others. It has changed the way institutions work with each other. I used to see a lot more sharing of resources. We would call each other up about a certain client that we have and say do you have any ideas? I could call up another college there and say could you extend your services to this person? It doesn't 't happen like it used to even five years ago. (Kelly, Lines 1275-1283)

College Student Learning and Development

This study seeks to increase understanding of the impact of collaborative practices on student learning and development. The literature suggests that student learning that is holistic, active, and seamless enhances success at college. Nevertheless, in the analysis I am unable to separate participant definitions of success in collaborative practice from success in common practice. They do not separate definitions of success in work within their own boundaries from work in a

collaborative situation. Although they feel strongly that collaborative approaches to some problems lead to better strategies, the goal of all strategies, whether common or collaborative, is always student learning and development. The participants apply the same success criteria to both kinds of practice.

The eclectic nature of their approach to collaboration, mentioned earlier, indicates these practitioners see student learning and development as the pervasive role for the entire college. Not only do they see themselves as educators, but also "it is critical that every person that works at the college understands that they have a role in student learning. It is not just teachers in a classroom. We are all teacher and we are all role models" (Alex, Lines 5500-5502).

The student is a consistent focus in the conversations with study participants. "Student success" stories are numerous and sometimes threatened to preempt other interview topics. Participants talk readily about both their successes and failures. They speak confidently about their ability to have a positive impact on student learning and development. Participants use both terms—student development and student learning—as they describe their work. Some see student development as the larger term encompassing student learning. Others see it as the other way around. There is agreement among participants that, whatever the term used, the concept is core to the role of student services. To the participants, a satisfactory resolution to an issue equates to student learning.

> If they demonstrate to me that they learned something as a result of their interaction, then it is a success. If they come back for their next appointment or another time down the road, and they show me or they talk to me about a behaviour that they've adopted as a result of some advice I gave them, that is success. (Kelly, Lines 1436-1438)

Student Success Means Learning and Development

Student success means student learning and development. All participants describe student learning outside the classroom as both complementary and foundational to classroom learning.

> In fact, things the person learns outside the classroom are often part of the structure and foundation on which they build their classroom learning. If you are not eating, or if you don't have money to get to school, those issues always take precedence over what you are going to learn in accounting class. And if you are not getting along with your neighbours, and you're pissed off with everybody in your program, you are not going to do well in the classroom. (Brett, Lines 621-626)

Some of the elements that constitute student learning and development, as identified by the participants, include (a) improved decision making and problem-solving skills (Morgan, Line 3311; Robin, Lines 7139, 7285, 7442); (b) increased responsibility and acceptance of consequences (Kelly, Line 1418; Morgan, Lines 3064, 3175); (c) personal maturation and confidence (Brett, Line 549; Robin, Line 7440); (d) better organizational skills (Kelly, Line 1430; Morgan, Line 3303; Rene, Line 2290); (e) changed behaviour (Dallas, Line 4261; Kelly, Line 1438); (f) awareness of social issues, tolerance, understanding and support of others (Brett, Line 584; Gerry, Line 6440; Morgan, Lines 3070, 3305, 3380); (g) greater understanding and acceptance of responsibility for their own health and physical wellness (Alex, Line 5488; Gerry, Line 6445); (h) improved social skills (Brett, Line 627; Rene, Line 275); and (i) setting and achieving goals (Alex, Lines 5488, 5498; Brett, Line 592; Gerry, Lines 6315, 6325). This is not a definitive list. It represents those elements that appeared to be most important to these particular participants.

Participants expect that the student will be active in the issue resolution and problem solution. The participants describe the role of the practitioner as support and mentorship, but also establishment of high expectations for student responsibility.

Strategies used by these practitioners are designed to help students access and assess available information and options. Many of them mentor students in activities that develop student skills in group dynamics, organization, and leadership. Practitioners seek to provide a safe and confidential environment for students to develop self-awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and career and lifestyle choices. Throughout, the goal is that of ensuring that students understand that they are accountable for their own behaviour and decisions.

These practitioners express confidence in their ability to impact student learning and development positively. Their talk is full of stories of "lessons learned;"

> They matured. They learned. I also saw that students learned just as much in residence as they did in class, probably more. Faculty probably wouldn't agree, but the students would learn. They would learn about their subject, but what they learned about sharing a kitchen with 20 people and having five of those people be just real pigs and having to learn to live with those people...well, ten years down the road they remember the residence experiences more than the classroom experiences. (Morgan, Lines 3295-3301)

> And if you give them some of the skills to work through some of those things, then I think they learn maybe quicker, because they are facing sort of some crisis maybe early, in relation to some other student, so if you can somehow give them some techniques to deal with some of those things, you know, you can see major, I mean MAJOR change in people. (Robin, Lines 7442-7446)

> Sometimes you never resolved the issue, because there simply wasn't time in their life at that point, but sometimes just recognizing was a success and they often said I will need to deal with this later on, or I know this is going to affect me later on, but having that awareness of those issues. (Gerry, Lines 6435-6438)

> So, for other students also, that was often a thing, they would come in and be worrying about, fearful about dealing with a friend and not knowing how to deal with that and after you would talk with them a little bit, and shared generally about depression or generally how about a student might act if they were suicidal, they go back out more equipped to do it, and to look after that situation. I did a lot of that with students because students looked after each other. So much. So much more than most people ever, ever, ever knew. They'd be up all night with a friend who drank too much, and that happened on a regular basis. And they'd look after each other, but they often came

> looking for educational help, am I doing the right things? (Gerry, Lines 6265-6272)
>
> Well, you know, this is very concrete, but my belief is that the role of that person is to help the learner get to where they want to be. To succeed in what they need to succeed at. And oftentimes, the things that students ask an advisor to do, like drop a course, are not helping them to succeed. It may help them to succeed in the short run, but it is not going to help them in the long run. So, a good advisor goes through a process to try to find out...is that really the best decision. (Alex, Lines 5486-5491)

Participant definitions of success did not depend on students staying in college. Success for the student sometimes meant leaving college. These practitioners did not hesitate to make sure that students understood all the options and that one option was to make their own decision to leave. "I did not hesitate to tell a student that it's better for you to go [leave college]" (Morgan, Line 3309). "Because sometimes we saw being successful as leaving, maybe because it wasn't the right program, or they weren't happy, or things at home were such that they needed to be out there" (Gerry, Lines 6320-6321).

Practitioner Success Means Student Learning and Development

The practitioners who were part of this study use internalized standards as their criteria for success, even while providing information for external reporting purposes. The single most important measure of success is the personal satisfaction of seeing students grow and learn. Kelly's observations on success reflected those of the other participants. Success is "student learning. I didn't do it. They did it. I was successful" (Kelly, Line 1443).

This concentration on student learning is also reflected in the participants placing a high value on collaboration with classroom-based faculty.

Section Three: Collaborative Practice: Terminology and Images

The language of study participants is a focus of this study and is addressed through the study questions. The literature review draws additional attention to the issues of terminology in reference to the difficulties that student services practitioners experience in making their work understandable to other parts of the college and to external groups.

This section presents the findings in two parts. First, findings are presented related to terms and labels pertaining to student services, collaboration, and boundary. This section both elaborates on the terms presented in the definition section and presents new terms emergent from the findings. The second part of this section presents the metaphors used by participants in our discussions of collaboration.

Additionally, the terminology issue results in two approaches to the presentation of findings designed to develop common understanding. First, in some cases, I judged that using the terms familiar to the participants was important for the future usefulness of these results. This occurs in the use of the terms collaboration, boundary conversations, and boundary connections. Second, in some instances I adopt or adapt terminology to reflect an emergent concept where participants struggled to apply a term, where terms were so numerous as to be meaningless, or where there was no suitable term in the literature. This occurs in the use of such terms as trans-positional, boundary perceptiveness, collaborative engagement, and student learning and development.

Terminology and Labels

Student learning and development.

Participants most often used the term "development," but their use of it is in the context of learning and they see it as the broader term.

> Student development is a much bigger umbrella. Academic learning is a small component of that, and I would like to think that people come to postsecondary to develop in a much broader context, to develop bigger interest, a bigger view of the world, and real knowledge about themselves and others. (Brett, Lines 568-573)

They recognize the importance of the broader phrase. In discussing the use of the phrase "student learning and development," all participants suggest that the new use of the term "student learning" within student services literature is primarily to put a spin on the older term "student development."

Collaboration.

Participant use of this term was discussed earlier in section two of this chapter. Their use indicates a very broad connotation of the term that includes a range of interactions moving them toward or away from an integrated relationship.

Boundary terminology.

The labels applied to the interactive boundary continuum were primarily drawn from the language of the participants. The labels "extensions," "conversations," and "connections" are all found in some form within the dialogues with participants. Robin spoke of the "willingness to extend your involvement" (Line 7424). Dallas spoke of "informal conversations with people that help you both to see

the big picture" (Line 4075), and then again of "seeing the connections" between services (Line 4342). "Connecting…that is a very powerful word and probably connotatively captures what I am talking about" (Brett, Line 666).

Some terms, for example "collaborative engagement," have been adopted from other sources. Participants described the engagement level of collaboration not with labels but with portrayals of what occurred there. For that reason, I searched the literature for a term and chose "engagement" as a label that was descriptive and, in my opinion, reflective of the nature of student services practice.

Two other new terms were used in these findings. The first is the concept "boundary perceptiveness." Because it emerged as a key skill displayed by the study participants, I saw a need for a label that was readily understood. The second term used in the findings is that of "trans-positional spaces." This term is used to describe those spaces that fall outside the boundary spaces of any particular position. Another way to think of these spaces is as interstitial spaces, falling between the limits of positions. The concept is based on the understanding that positional descriptions within student services are not contiguous, and on their own, do not cover all the issues that arise in practice.

Words not used by practitioners are also instructive. They do not use the term "boundaryless." Although they talk about the importance of not doing the professional work of another, they do not use the term "boundary crossing." Only one person uses the term " boundary spanning." Alex indicates that "student services people are the boundary spanners within the institution because they see, or should see, all that is going on with students" (Line 5067).

Images

Among the benefits of qualitative research using a conversational interview approach is the opportunity to explore any new avenues of thought not necessarily anticipated in the original research design. A significant idea emerging from this study is the participants' use of descriptive metaphor to describe their collaborative work. The use of metaphor in describing collaborative work was not identified in the original literature review. Its use, however, should not have been surprising. Morgan (1998) identified that metaphor is a basic tool of human communication that can "stretch our thinking and deepen our understandings" (p. 5). This finding sent me back to the literature where I discovered that metaphor has been a common way to explain collaboration. This exploration resulted in additions to the literature review in Chapter Two.

Study participants used three distinct, but similar, metaphors to describe collaborative practice. A successful collaboration is viewed as an expanding circle of involvement. The second image is that of a 'round table' of equals. A third image is of a flower. Each image describes "different people in the mix, all helping this one individual as a team, which came together, coalesced, and created this one sort of single entity of service" (Brett, Line 103).

An expanding circle.

Several participants described a process that begins informally, with a few key people, and then expands to draw people into a "circle." As information is shared and a clearer, more complete picture of the issue develops, others are added to the

circle as their involvement in the issue becomes known, or as different expertise becomes important.

> So it was kind of… we started off in a very sort of tight, spreading of concentric circles of knowledge and then after that we kind of let the whole thing become purposely blurred, and then interacted as required. There was lots of encouragement and invitation to engage in this, as required. (Brett, Lines 271-274)

The round table of equals.

This image suggests that when an issue occurs in the shared spaces, all available student services expertise is drawn to a "table," although not necessarily a physical table. Acceptance at the table depends on the individual having successfully met the testing tactics discussed earlier in these findings. In this model, all input from all participants is equally valued. Available information is put on to the table for discussion in a free-flowing, brainstorming manner. Not all of those at the table have information to share. All participants have expertise and experience with students, however, and may have creative suggestions for solution. The best strategies are identified and the most appropriate leadership emerges to ensure that the shared strategy is carried forward.

> Someone would say, I need to address this issue, in this setting of key people like the counsellor, the nurse etc. and then I would say here is what I see has happened with this student, and i need to know is anyone else seeing this? What is your take on this issue? People would respond if they had any input as to why that student was in that situation that they had come to me about. So that seemed to be… some would be just silent, and would say I have not worked with that student and everyone was OK with that. Those that were able to input would do so, and we would try to come to some kind of plan. Look, I can do this from this angle; let me take that. Or they would say, here is what I know about this situation, and this may help you to deal with this and take it one step further. So it seemed to just… whoever seemed to be the key person who had the closest tie with the problem would then take it from there. (Rene, Lines 2124-2133)

In this model, study participants indicate that there is likely some divergence among practitioners, related to the understanding of who is an "equal." Some would see the input from concerned others as vital and see them as being 'equals' at the table in certain situations. This might include parents, chaplains, police, or security and custodial staff who see students at night when the professionals have closed their offices. This level of egalitarianism presumes that all people who work at a college have experience with and concern for the student.

> Because the janitor is the person who oftentimes have the most influence over the kids who are having the most difficulty, because the professional people don't like those kids anymore!!! Most people would never think about that. They would think, you know, why would you ever think about that? Because, they are the only ones here after 8 o'clock. That's why! And that's when people, oftentimes, display their despondency or whatever it might be. (Alex, Lines 5344-5359)

Some participants feel that this concept will not receive universal support in student services units. Some practitioners see those on the "outside" of their profession as sources of traditional referrals only, and not part of strategic solutions. Others may be concerned about the inclusion of people who may not recognize the importance of confidentiality. This issue was earlier highlighted as "personal arrogance" and is seen as a barrier to collaborative practice.

The flower.

Originally a metaphor for student services, this image also serves as an image of collaborative practice. The petals of the flower represent the various services that constitute the college mandate, including common student services functions such as advising, counselling, health services, recreation, and financial aid, but also other college functions such as programs, bookstores, or security. While on the petal, the practitioner is "doing" counselling, security, or advising. The centre of

the flower becomes the shared space where collaboration takes place and where "student services" work occurs.

> In this case, the flower being the bigger picture of the organization; so that if all of that is working collaboratively, then it allows the growth of the individual in their social, physical, affective, cognitive, environmental and spiritual development. If the rest of it's not there, then it fragments from what the individual learner needs and you end up with situations where students aren't getting the best of what they can get. (Alex, Lines 5109-5112)

Summary

This chapter presents the study results within three focus areas: boundary management theory, student services practice, and terminology and images.

Section one presents the findings with respect to boundary management activities of the exemplary practitioners who were part of this study. The participants in this study have strong personal boundaries, combined with flexible and permeable positional boundaries. This combination enables them to maintain necessary ethical boundaries while still being flexible within collaborative situations. They are perceptive about the role and importance of boundaries. These student services practitioners work in an environment with a significant amount of "grey area" surrounding their positional boundaries. The actual boundaries of their positions are not always well delineated and serve as transitional spaces between their role and those of others. They often work in these spaces in collaboration with others. These spaces are labelled as trans-positional spaces.

Participants use a variety of tactical actions as they work along or outside of their positional boundaries. These actions are aggregated into the seven action categories of stretching, initiating, testing, risk taking, consolidating, committing, and creating. Such actions are used in the development and maintenance of

collaborative relationships. These tactics are further aggregated into categories related to the purpose of the tactic. A continuum of interactions emerged, descriptive of the type of interactions that occur as participants move toward or away from more integrative relationships along their positional boundaries. The continuum includes boundary extensions, boundary conversations, boundary connections, and collaborative engagements.

Section two of the chapter presents the findings reflective of the participants' perceptions about collaboration. These practitioners believe that collaboration is core to good student services practice, and that collaborative interactions improve practice and student learning and development. The day-to-day practices of these participants involve a seamless movement back and forth between common practice and collaborative practice, with both being an essential part of a studentcentred approach. Participants use feedback from students, parents, and others within the organization to reflect on the success of their practices. Their criteria for success focus on student learning and development. A model (Figure 2) of student services practice is provided to reflect the general flow followed by these exemplary practitioners as they deal with issues. The model does not reflect the seamlessness of their thinking, but generally reflects the patterns of activities they follow.

The collaborative initiatives identified by these participants involve other student services practitioners, classroom-based faculty, and many others within and outside of the college. They see collaboration with classroom-based faculty as important to the success of students, but recognize that there are still many barriers to the level of integration they envision.

Participants identify several factors that are considered fundamental to successful collaboration. Four of these, trust, self-confidence, an ethic of care, and

valuing others, are considered essential. Other important factors are shared understandings, good judgement, communication, and supportive leadership. Several constraints to successful collaboration are also identified: (a) power issues, (b) personal arrogance, (c) professional ethics used as an excuse, (d) "black and white" attitudes, (e) divergent values, (f) impact of budget cuts, and (g) unclear organizational messages.

The successful collaborative initiatives that these participants have experienced share several important features. A focus on the identification of the best strategies for student learning and development is important to successful collaboration. Sharing of information and expertise at a high level of confidence is essential to ensure that the "big picture" contains a holistic solution. One result of collaboration is development of collective strategies that ensure a consistent approach to the issue. The collaboration must take place in a safe environment where individuals can advance ideas and opinions without fear of rejection or betrayal. There is a parity of position within the collaboration that may not exist external to the situation. The most successful collaborations include an eclectic membership that encompasses all those who might contribute to the facilitation of solutions. Most collaborative experiences identified by these practitioners were informal, and initiated by the members and not by an administrative structure.

All of the activities of these exemplary practitioners focus on enhancing student learning and development. They see their own success through the incidents of student learning and development and have a high level of confidence in their ability to impact this result.

Section three of the chapter highlights the findings with respect to terminology and presents three metaphors that emerged from the conversations with study participants.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter provides the opportunity to look at the findings gleaned from the insights of the eight study participants in a creative way and to integrate and compare those findings to the research and literature presented in Chapter Two. Additionally, as a result of some emergent and unexpected findings, I returned to and extended the literature review. Some literature not originally considered is integrated here.

Unfortunately, there is little research on collaboration to draw on from student services theory and practice. What exists is from the United States. Comment about the need for collaborative practice in student services can be found within the student services literature (Komives, n.d.; Kuh, 1993,1996; Schroeder, 2001), with the two main research studies those of Kolins (2000) and Hartley (2001). There is some information about specific examples of collaboration between organizational units, such as the summaries provided by Blimling et al. (1999, pp. 145-153). There is little research, however, that examines the day-to-day work of practitioners, and none that uses boundary theory as a framework. Thus much of the research integrated in this chapter is from public education, human communications, and organizational theory.

Five study questions serve as a framework for the structure of this chapter, with the related findings discussed within each question area. The five study questions are:

1. How do outstanding student services practitioners see the role and function of collaboration within student services practice?
2. What factors do these practitioners perceive to be important to a successful collaborative approach to student services?

3. How does collaborative practice impact college student learning and development?
4. What boundary management strategies and tactics do these individuals use as they work collaboratively within, along, and outside of their positional boundaries?
5. What terminology and images do practitioners use to express their perceptions of collaborative practice?

Study Question One: How do outstanding student services practitioners see the role and function of collaboration within student services practice?

Concepts of Collaboration

The practitioners who were part of this study were not asked specifically to define the term collaboration. They were asked to talk about their collaborative practices, and within that talk I searched for meanings that would represent their concepts of collaboration. As indicated in the findings, these practitioners have a broad understanding of the term. This is contrary to my own expressed preference to define collaboration more narrowly, an approach supported by the writings of Schroeder (2001) and others. Friend and Cook (2000) suggest that collaboration has become the latest educational buzzword. Others, like Mintzberg et al. (1996), identify the faddish nature of the term in organizational and management literature and the need to separate the "necessary from the nonsense" (p. 60) if the usefulness of the concept is to be realized.

Friend and Cook (2000) find, as I did, few clear definitions of the term, and feel it necessary to provide a careful definition in their work in order to support effective implementation. They describe collaboration as a "style of interaction" (p. 6).

This definition is close to that of Mostert (1998), whose definition narrows the term to a "style of professional interaction" (p. 16). Others define it as a process of working across organizational units (Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Liedtka et al., 1998).

Collaboration can also be seen as a strategy for managing relationships with external groups, as it is by Collazo-Baker (2000) in her thesis on boundary management between schools. She defines collaboration as a strategy that helps organizations promote and develop the connections that will assist them in managing the environment around them. Collaboration strategies are part of a "partnership continuum" (p. 289) starting with communication, cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and finally partnership. She sees collaboration as "the second highest level of inter-organizational interdependence" (p. 54).

During the period of this study, my need and determination to narrow the definition of collaboration changed because the practitioners see collaboration as a broad concept involving several types of interaction. They consider collaboration as an approach to practice, invoking a continuum of activities from simple politeness to the most integrated level of interaction. If this study is to provide anything useful for further practice, it needs to use the terminology of its workplace. Perhaps the effort to clarify and narrow the meaning of the term will continue among the theorists, as part of their contribution to the profession. For the near future, practitioners will likely continue to see collaboration as a description of the seamless approach they take to their work and their positions.

I feel that it is important to revert to the broad use of the term for the purpose of accurately and fairly reflecting the wisdom of the practitioners who were part of this study. Within student service literature, in 1996, Kuh used the phrase "highest levels of collaboration and cooperation" (p. 140). Since Kuh uses the term broadly, it

suggests that in 1996 the student services theorists (of which he is an outstanding example) were still using a general approach to the term. Since then, there have been attempts to refine its use, but that movement has not reached the practice level in the province of Alberta.

Collaboration is Core to Good Practice

The research and literature supports the views of these participants. Collaboration is listed as one of the principles of good practice (Blimling et al., 1999). Blimling et al. go on to say that, although collaboration has been a recurring theme in student service history, "it is usually easier to write about it than to actually do it" (p. 18). Participants agree. They hold strong beliefs around the importance of collaboration. They are able to give many examples of successful collaborative initiatives. They all agree that good practice requires collaboration. The reasons given are (a) a greater amount of knowledge and experience is available, (b) a greater number of possible strategies are identified, and (c) greater consistency and acceptance of the strategies are achieved. Yet, participants also identify significant barriers to successful collaboration and several instances where it should, but does not, happen.

Collaboration Improves Practice

The assertion by these outstanding practitioners that collaboration improves practice through improved strategies for students, better decision-making, greater efficiency, and increased wisdom and creativity is supported by the literature of student services (Bliming et al., 1999; Consolvo et al., 1997; Engstom & Tinto, 2000).

Collaboration might improve skills (Arujo, 1998); enhance student learning and development (Love & Goodsell Love, 1995); increase ingenuity and inventiveness in difficult issue resolution (Bruffee, 1987); and reduce cultural differences among various groups (Schroeder, 1999). These potential benefits are also supported in educational literature (e.g., da Costa and Riordan, 1997; Friend and Cook, 2000; Johnston, 1997), and in organizational literature (e.g., Araujo, 1998; Halley, 1997; Kasl et al., 1997; Mintzberg et al., 1996).

Although these practitioners see collaboration as an important way to improve their practice, they realize that it does not work for everybody. On this point, Johnston (1997) agrees. In her story of collaboration, Johnston comments that "some teachers are interested and some are not" (p. 162). It is hard to change established norms and behaviours. The practitioners of this study identify ways to work collaboratively, even though there are those in their organizations who do not. This is not to propose that others are not successful practitioners, but to reflect that these particular outstanding practitioners find value in both approaches.

Collaboration as Student-centred Practice

Good practice in college student services is student centred and focused on strategies that intentionally enhance the learning experience for students. Again, Blimling et al. (1999) provide the most succinct description of this concept. They comment on the trend from content centred toward student-centred education that puts the educated citizen at the heart of the purpose. "The student-centred orientation for higher education is reflected in the shift from viewing colleges as places where instruction takes place to places where learning is fostered" (p. 13). In the same way, the collaborative activities of these practitioners are student focused.

Their activities and strategies and, in fact, most of their comments during the interviews, are focused on what students are learning both in and out of the classroom. Not only should student services focus on learning, but also the participants feel that all institutional staff should see themselves as educators.

In contrast, organizational literature generally sees collaboration as a means to increase productivity and efficiency (Arnold & Clark, 1998; Bruhn & Lewis, 1992; Chagnon, 1997; Mintzberg et al., 1996). For the practitioners in this study, increased efficiency is seen as a benefit of collaboration but not the central purpose, which is improved strategies for students.

Seamlessness in Practice

In much of the current literature about student services practice, there is a vision of seamless learning environments for students that integrates student learning both in and out of the classroom (American College Personnel Association, 2001; Blimling et al., 1999; Kuh, 1993, 1996; Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994). This study does not find evidence of that seamlessness. The concept of seamlessness does appear, however, in three ways.

First, there is a seamlessness to the approach taken by these practitioners in their day-to-day work with students. In this study, I had originally proposed a flowchart of student services practice that shows a separation of common practice from collaborative practice. Although the diagram does reasonably represent the flow of practice as described by study participants, it fails to show the seamless way in which these practitioners approach their day-to-day work. Rather than an "either/or" approach, they use more of a "both/and" approach (Halley, 1995, p. 197) as they move smoothly between common practice and collaborative practice approaches.

Second, there is a sense of seamlessness in how these practitioners view student success and their own personal success, evaluating their own success by the fact that student learning has been demonstrated. I have been unable to find any discussion of this type of seamlessness in the literature of student service practice. In *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (1999), Schroeder touches on developing seamless learning environments through partnerships across departments and divisions and outside the institution, but does not attempt to look at seamlessness within practice itself. With respect to the approach of exemplary practitioners, I cannot help but think that this seamlessness is an intrinsic part of their practice.

The third aspect of seamlessness arises with reference to participants' views about student learning and development. Until recently, the research on learning and development has concentrated on quantitative measures of success using student outcome measures (Astin, 1993; Stage, 1992). Kuh, writing in *Enhancing Student Learning* (Stage et al., 1999), encourages joint use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches because of the greater richness of the results and also because of a "built-in bias that exists against qualitative approaches" (p. 129). In none of the studies reviewed was information gathered from the practitioners' themselves about student learning and development in college. It is thus difficult to determine if the seamless way in which these practitioners view learning and development is indicative of a broader attitude in student services or is limited to this particular group of practitioners. The finding that these practitioners measure their success in terms of student success is unexpected and tantalizing. Further study is needed to confirm applicability to other practitioners. Further comment on student learning and development is found in the discussion of question three.

The practitioners in this study are all very experienced, with eight to 28 years of experience in student services practice. It may be speculated that the seamless approach that enables them to move back and forth from common practice to collaborative practice is the result of the development of the schema and scripts for boundary transitions as described by Ashforth et al. (2000). These researchers describe schemas as the scripts developed over time to ease and facilitate transitions that "become more automatic over time so that one may enter a role and execute at least portions of it quite reflexively" (p. 488). The participants are seasoned and competent in their own professions, with significant experience in working across functional areas. Subsequently, in an apparent seamlessness of their practice and thinking, they move from one approach to another without much reflection upon the transition process.

Reflection on Practice

The practitioners use both self-reflection and group reflection to learn from one another and from their experiences. Again, participants do not separate their learning in collaborative and common practice situations.

Several writers mention reflective learning as a benefit of collaboration. In their organizational study of teamwork in the civil service, Arnold and Clark (1998) identify reflective practice as a valuable feature of a collaborative model. They conclude that successful collaboration includes an attitude of "learning from participants" (p. 161). Araujo (1998) advances the idea of knowing and learning as collective practices that develop best through networking and boundary connections. Brown at al. (1992) in a study of 12 student affairs administrators concludes that they are applied theorists and reflective practitioners. The ability to draw knowledge from

across professional boundaries is identified by Collens (1998) as a key future skill for innovation and creativity. The participants in this study are also reflective on their practice in the sense described by Schön (1995). They acquire significant tacit knowledge through their day-to-day experiences and demonstrate Schön's "knowing-in-action" (p. 30) approach to practice.

I suggest that these practitioners, through their reflective, collaborative practices have already developed some of the skills for future practice called for by Keeling (2001). Keeling challenges practitioners to be "sensors to recognize new challenges as they incubate" (p. 1) and to work within the new employment models that today's students will face.

Collaboration Outside Student Services

"Staff in student affairs have historically kept their [collaborative] efforts focused almost exclusively *within* their organizational boundaries, rather than reaching out and assuming a broader, institutional perspective necessary for collaboration" (Schroeder, 2001, p. 2). To some extent, Schroeder's comment is true of the participants in this study. Most of the examples of collaboration identified in this study occur within student services type units, regardless of whether they were officially part of the organizational unit. That is, units or groups who work with students outside the classroom often work together, whether or not they are part of a student services unit in the administrative sense. In their stories of practice, however, the participants indicate that they work closely with a wide variety of individuals and groups outside student services. Most of these relationships are ongoing connections that work effectively. They include campus business units (accounts, bookstore, and cafeteria) and external groups such as police, social workers, clergy,

businesses, parents, and families. Students are also frequently part of collaboration initiatives. This is clearly accepted as good practice (ACPA & NASPA, 1997).

The most problematic of relationships, as well as the most crucial, are those with classroom-based faculty. As mentioned previously, this study does not find the seamlessness in the learning environment predicted by much of the current theory in student services and cleared envisioned by the authors of *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (American College Personnel Association, 2000).

The difficulties of integrating two very distinct cultures of academic and student services units is identified by Bondeson (1996) and confirmed by this study. The statement of one practitioner that "we are not there yet" echoes the findings of Hartley (2001) who discovered that many senior student affairs officers in the United States see "partnering with faculty a significant, ongoing challenge" (p. 235). This is also reflected in other literature (Baxter Magolda et al., 1999; Kuh et al., 1994). Reassuringly, the situation of cultural differences does not prevent these practitioners from undertaking boundary conversations and connections with individuals in academic units, with the goal of engaging in collaborative initiatives similar to successful examples highlighted in the literature (e.g., Kezar, Hirsch, and Burack, 2002; Terrell and Watson, 1996; White, 1993; Yeater et al., 2001).

Clement and Rickard (1992) state that enlisting the support of faculty is uniformly seen by the outstanding student services leaders in their study, as an essential element of success. Nonetheless, they identify the major obstacle as differing cultures. They quote one of the participants in their study as stating "it seems to me that some faculty are imbued with the notion that they represent a superior form of life, that staff members cannot develop meaningful relationships with

them" (p. 108). On the other hand, they found many initiatives that were successfully able to "span both guilds" (p. 121).

A recent study by Kolins (2000) presents a more optimistic view of the situation. Kolins' study examines the views of senior academic and student services officers in two-year colleges and finds that both groups "perceive collaboration as important to enhancing student success" (p. 9).

Finally, Bliming et al.(1999) also identify this issue and specifically mention that some faculty see student services staff as "coddlers of the weak and inept" (p. 140), a phrase that is regrettably and uncomfortably close to those used by the participants in this study, indicating that not much progress has been made in this respect.

Study Question Two: What factors do these practitioners perceive to be important to a successful collaborative approach to student services?

Fundamentals of Collaboration

Kolins (2000) identifies four predictors of successful collaboration, all four of which are supported by this study. The first predictor, the "blending and stretching of roles" (p. 10), is identified in this study as a core concept in the engagement level of boundary interactions, an interaction that sometimes requires new roles to be enacted. Kolins' second and third predictors, those of "communicating directly between leaders" and "validating collaboration from the top" (p. 10) are supported in this study through the concepts of leadership modeling and encouraging of collaborative practice. The participants in this study also support Kolins' final

predictor of "understanding our differences" (p. 10) in their identification of the importance of eclectic membership and validation as part of collaboration.

Trust, self-confidence, care, and valuing.

The four factors identified by these practitioners as most important to successful collaboration are both supported by and supportive of many other studies exploring collaboration issues.

With respect to trust and self-confidence, the study by da Costa and Riordan (1997) of the collaborative practices of teachers identifies that trust and efficacy levels have an effect on the collaborative process. Higher levels of trust and efficacy encourage teachers to a higher level of risk in sharing "ideas on more sensitive topics" (p. 5), and thereby enable them to address more difficult and complex problems. Liedtka et al. (1998) likewise identify trust as a major factor in effective collaborations, and add the importance of shared values and personal engagement as contributing to success. Bacarach et al. (2000) similarly identify that an individual's personal experience, confidence, and knowledge affect the degree of involvement in collaborative situations.

The concept of care is also basic to writings about quality student services (Kuh et al., 1994). Kuh et al. (1991) find that an ethic of care for students is foundational in successful, involving colleges. Such an ethic expresses itself in a culture of concern and a sense of community membership for students. Clement and Rickard (1992), in their study of effective leaders in student services, devote a complete chapter to the ethic of care (pp. 197-204). Although most of the writing addresses the issue of care with respect to how students are treated, it is logical to

suggest that the need for an ethic of caring is basic to how staff work with one another in collaborative situations.

The requirement to value the role of other staff members as identified in this study does not specifically appear in any of the student services literature reviewed. It can, however, be inferred from the standard works in the field, such as the basic handbook edited by Barr et al. (2000) and the work of Bliming et al. Clement and Rickard (1992) speak of the need to "treat all members of the community with respect and dignity" (p. 43). The concept does appear in the educational literature specifically with respect to working with students with disabilities. Friend and Cook (2000) use the term "parity" to describe the importance of validation, where "each person's contribution to the collaboration is equally valued" (p. 8). Mostert (1998) calls this "inter-professional respect," meaning "respect for the viewpoints of others" (p. 142). The importance of the concept in this particular area of education may result from the current approach to involve a wide variety of expertise in the education of students with disabilities. Conversely, studies such as da Costa and Riordan's (1997) look at collaboration between professionals, in this case, teachers. As such, it can be assumed the intra-professional respect is already in place. The inclusive multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches described by Mostert and Friend and Cook are accurate descriptions of how collaboration within college student services must work, through the involvement of a variety of practitioners with diverse backgrounds, training, and expertise.

Other factors.

Other important factors identified by this group of practitioners are shared understandings, good judgement, open communication, and supportive leadership.

All of these factors can be supported from the literature related to this study. The relative merit assigned to each of these varies from the literature available to this study, just as the literature itself varies in how it assigns importance to these factors. Once again, the uniqueness of this study is that it gives voice to the Alberta practitioner in a way that other studies have not.

Characteristics of Successful Collaborations

Whether the term used is partnership, team, work group, or collaboration, the literature looking at the operation of multilevel, cross-functional groups identifies that the success of these approaches in the workplace depends on some basic "rules." While rules are often characterized as inhibiting and bureaucratic (Wilson et al., 1998), the study participants indicate that some guidelines and parameters are important to success and intrinsic to their experiences in collaborative involvement. Support for this is found in many of the writings about teamwork, groups, and collaboration.

Once again, the closest comparisons to this study are those identified by Friend and Cook (2000), Mostert (1998), and Arnold and Clark (1998). The importance of shared purpose, shared information, collective strategies, and eclectic membership identified by this study's participants is supported by these authors. Arnold and Clark are the only researchers who also mention the issue of safety, that is, the freedom to express oneself within the group. The idea that collaboration initiatives are often informal is not mentioned in any of the three. All three studies see collaborative activity as fairly structured and planned. The claim by Mintzberg et al. (1996) that "the best collaboration may be that least realized as collaborative" (p. 63) suggests that both formal and informal approaches to collaboration can work. This

current study identified that informal collaboration was the most frequent type used by these practitioners. In that respect, it differs from most other studies that look at formal arrangements.

Friend and Cook (2000) and Mostert (1998) suggest that shared resources, shared accountability, and voluntary participation are essential to successful collaborations. None of these issues arose in the current study. In one significant respect, the emphasis of Arnold and Clark (1998) differs from this current study, as well as from the work of Friend and Cook and of Mostert. Arnold and Clark identify the most important purpose of collaboration as increased production, understandable in the context of their study of the civil service in Great Britain. Although improved efficiency was mentioned by several participants in this study as a benefit of collaboration within student services, it was not seen as a purpose.

Unfortunately, little research literature within student services addresses these issues in a comprehensive way that would encourage comparison with the current study. One study that comes close is that of Cambiano (2000) in a case study of collaboration between academic and student affairs units at a university. He highlights the importance of shared vision, multi-party membership, power sharing, and the opportunity to be heard and understood as key factors in successful collaboration.

Constraints to Successful Collaboration

Although agreeing that not all situations need a collaborative approach, the participants in this study identify several constraints that are counterproductive to situations where they believe that collaboration was needed. These constraints include individual factors such as power issues, personal arrogance, misuse of

professional ethics, and black and white attitudes, as well as environmental and organizational factors such as conflicting messages, lack of support and leadership, and increasing workloads. All of these factors are identified in the literature.

What is different here is that the problems have been seen at a practitioner level, rather than a management level. Thus the problems are expressed in the language of the practitioner, and not in the language of academics or managers, as used by the authors of *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling et al., 1999). This is not to criticize other approaches to expressing the challenges of collaboration, but simply to underline that the approach of this study was to examine the day-to-day work of practitioners and to give voice to their experience and language. Although the participants' list of problematic factors may be more concrete and less complete, it is still possible to relate their factors to the broader issues included in the survey of literature in *Good Practice in Student Affairs.* Five obstacles and constraints to collaboration are paraphrased from their summary (pp. 135-141).

First, the basic structure of a two-year college is that of a loosely coupled but bureaucratic and hierarchical organization with functional silos that encourage independence and fragmentation. This makes it hard to create a common vision and seamless environments. Although this study does not look at organizational practices, participants have identified a confused message about collaboration coming from the provincial context in Alberta, which impacts their work.

Organizational issues such as the silo mentality described by Komives (n.d.) do not arise as major issues for the participants, and therefore are not intentionally pursued by the researcher. The fact that they work in a bureaucratic organization and have to work within certain constraints does not hamper their ability to form

productive networks and alliances. Although aware of constraints, they continue to work collaboratively as they seek ways to improve the experience of students.

Second, the "tyranny of custom" (Seymour, 1995, p.137) and standardized practice creates reluctance to change and a constant effort to maintain consistency and continuity. Seymour also identifies this as a problem occurring when practices become "so institutionalized that competence becomes associated with how well one adheres to the rules" (p. 101). Participants in this study have experienced this attitude in others, calling this a "black and white attitude." They also indicate that they often adapt and push institutional rules to find creative strategies for problem resolution.

Third, the absence of assertive and effective leadership providing a clear message about the organizational vision can hamper collaborative initiatives. Participants speak of leadership on two levels. At one level, they refer to what they perceive to be a confused message from Alberta Learning about the role of collaboration in an atmosphere of competition. Morgan's (1998) contention that organizations can be both competitive and collaborative with other organizations in the same sector applies to the environments described by the participants. Whether these colleges have been successful in this regard has not been explored. For the practitioners there is a sense of growing competition that prevents cooperation in some instances. In other cases, the participants describe situations in which they have been able to continue collaborative arrangements at the provincial level.

At another level, the participants speak of leadership by the administrators of the college. Comments here reflect both positive and negative experiences. Administrative leadership issues are not specifically in this study. Instead, the study concentrates on the day-to-day experiences of the front-line practitioner. Despite

that, the conversational nature of the interview allowed the participants to emphasize issues of importance to them. Support for these perceptions can be found in much of the research on leadership in current college environments. They identify effective leadership as important to the success of collaborative practice, agreeing with Schroeder who, in discussing good practice in student services (Bliming et al., 1999), indicates that "forging educational partnerships requires assertive, effective leadership" (p. 139).

Fourth, the fundamental differences in core assumptions and mental models, particularly with respect to views about student learning, can hamper collaborative initiatives between student services and academic divisions. Although student learning and development is basic to the practice of these participants, they identify a lack of recognition among faculty of the role of student services in student learning. This issue has been addressed earlier in this chapter.

Fifth, an unwillingness to learn from others is identified by these participants as problematic, and in stark contrast to their personal style of constant learning and their recognition of the value of learning from others. Senge (1990) identifies this tendency to focus on a position description or a particular role with little or no sense of responsibility or concern about the larger context as an organizational learning disability. Participants express this in very practical terms as personal arrogance and the misuse of ethical guidelines. One participant finds that some professionals have an "unwillingness to take any suggestions or thought on the matter from me" (Morgan, line 3415). An unwillingness to learn from others is the obverse side of an unwillingness to share knowledge.

The power issues identified by the study can also be subsumed in this category. The relationship of knowledge to power and the necessity to give up power

in a collaborative situation is highlighted in several of the studies reviewed for this research (Arnold & Clark, 1998; Liedtka et al., 1998; Mintzberg et al., 1996).

Participants in the present study identify factors also identified in other literature: lack of time to collaborate (Beck & Yeager, 1996; Clement & Rickard, 1992); miscommunication and power imbalances (Petronio et al., 1998); and a lack of awareness of boundary rules and rigid boundaries (Wilson et al., 1998). Of these factors, the need for time was of major import to the practitioners in this study. Collaboration takes time because it is a "slower and more consensual process" (Mintzberg et al., 1996, p. 64) and in times of heavy workloads or crises may be abandoned in favour of command and control approaches. Bondeson (1996) contends that hard times often force a return to conservative and rigid approaches in education.

Study Question Three: How does collaborative practice impact college student learning and development?

College Student Learning and Development

Participants in the study view the terms "learning" and "development" as synonymous. Four participants specifically identified that the use of the term "learning" has become more widespread with the recent emphasis on both student and organizational learning. For these four participants reference to learning is an effective way to describe the more holistic approach on which good student services units focus. In this they are supported by a study by Hartley (2001), which addresses the perceptions of leaders in the field and identifies both the practical and political

reasons for the emphasis on student learning. The results of Hartley's study and the attitudes of the practitioners are summed up in the title of an article by Brown in the special issue of the *Journal of College Student Development* (March/April, 1996). Brown chooses to call his article "We've been there. We've done that. Let's keep it up" (p. 239).

Although most of the participants in this study viewed student development as the broader term, the recent writings by leaders in the student services field (O'Banion, 1998; Schroeder, 2001) and proclamation documents like the *Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 2000), use the term "learning" as the broader concept. This is understandable when one considers that the outstanding theorists in the field may be trying to move the terminology of the profession forward in a way that may bring greater understanding to the role of student services within an institution.

Despite the disparities in terminology, the understandings that the participants have about student learning and development fit closely with the research and literature. The centrality of a holistic approach to students and the role of student services in designing intentional, educationally purposeful activity are supported by recent writing in student services (ACPA, 2000; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Blimling et al., 1999; Evans et al., 1998) and by the 1937 foundational document *Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937/1994).

Unfortunately, there is little research on the direct impact that student services practitioners have on student outcomes (Love, 1995). Several studies (e.g., Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991) explore student outcomes from the student perspective focused on outcomes in such areas as attitudes, ethics, morality, and identity. White (1993) explores the impact of collaboration between student services and instructional units with respect to student persistence and

retention in community college. Her qualitative case study identifies factors that are perceived to be important to student persistence, but does not actually measure the impact of those factors. This current study does not add directly to the knowledge of student outcomes. Instead, like White, it provides the perspectives of practitioners on the goals for student learning and development. The practitioners use an approach to issues that focuses on learning by engaging the student in active resolution of issues and of integrating learning in and out of the classroom. This approach is identified as a best practice in the student services literature (Blimling et al., 1999; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Study participants describe many situations where students demonstrate significant learning and development. Subsequent analysis produces a list of seven learning outcomes identified in Chapter Four. This list is similar, though more specific, to outcome lists found within the literature (Kuh et al., 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). All of these studies are from the United States and focus on universities and four-year colleges. The student learning orientation at two-year colleges in Alberta is quite different and is primarily focused on employability skills. A more useful comparison therefore, is to the current inventory of employability skills produced by the Conference Board of Canada. This inventory has three main categories into which the success outcomes identified by the participants of this study can be easily integrated. The first category, that of fundamental skills, can be seen to encompass the participants' goals for student outcomes: (a) improved decision-making and problem-solving skills, (d) better organizational skills, and (i) setting and achieving goals. The second category from the Conference Board inventory is personal management skills, which encompass study outcomes (b) increased responsibility and acceptance of consequences, (c) personal maturation

and confidence, (e) changed behaviour, and (g) greater understanding and acceptance of responsibility for their own health and physical wellness. The third category, labeled teamwork skills, encompasses study outcomes (f) awareness of social issues, tolerance, understanding and support of others, and (h) improved social skills.

The practitioners who participated in this study are confident that their work has a direct impact on student learning and development. Each has an "ethos of learning" that guides their activities. This term is found in many places in the student services literature and can be defined as "a deeply held belief in holistic talent development unaffected by the institution's physical size, or psychological boundaries, reputational rank, or size of endowment" (Kuh et al., 1994, p. 61). Kuh et al. (1991) in their study of successful colleges find that students at colleges identified as having an ethos of learning make greater gains in learning and personal development than students at other institutions.

Study Question Four: What boundary management strategies and tactics do these individuals use as they work collaboratively within, along, and outside of their positional boundaries?

Boundary Characteristics

At the beginning of this study, I proposed that the study would look at both boundaries of self and boundaries of positions in order to understand the work of student services practitioners. Looking at the personal and positional boundary strength of these individuals is an important part of the study. Although it does not

attempt to correlate any information between the two types of boundary, it can be argued that a need for both permeability and flexibility in both types is essential for collaboration. Two findings emerge in this regard. First, it is necessary for individuals to be willing to extend their positional boundaries, as well as to be willing to leave those positional boundaries to work in trans-positional spaces. Second, once within shared spaces, it is essential that individuals be willing to hear, assess, and value the actions, ideas, and emotions of others. This is Hartmann's definition of personal boundary permeability (Hartmann, 1991).

The results of the survey instrument were an initial surprise to me and to most of the study participants. During the member checking process, all of the participants who responded indicated that they had expected their boundaries to be "thinner." The HBQ results appeared to be contrary to my initial understanding of the work of Ernest Hartmann (1991) as outlined in the literature review of this section. Hartmann says that people with thick boundaries work best in jobs that are well structured with clear lines of authority. Those with thinner boundaries work best in less-structured environments. On the surface it would appear that thinner boundaries would encourage collaboration. These participants had boundaries that were thicker, rather than thinner. A second look at the results and at Hartmann's work helps explain the contradiction.

Although the collaborative situations described by these participants require that their positional boundaries be extended and exited, there is still some significant structure to the situations. This is indicated by the characteristics of successful collaboration mentioned previously. Additionally, it is clear from the findings that certain boundaries are still extremely important and respected by the participants.

Hartmann (1991) refers to "personal solidity" (p. 123) as a characteristic of this group. He also suggests that both genetics and environmental experiences influence boundary types. In general, says Hartmann, boundaries thicken with age, but that personal solidity can be combined with a flexible view about the world developed from experience and environment. The participants in this study work in post-secondary institutions and are able to have significant, lengthy, and successful careers within an environment that has been identified as essentially bureaucratic in nature and structured in distinct organizational units.

Additionally, the sample was very small and cannot be generalized in any way. The most that can be said is that this particular group of outstanding student services practitioners has thicker self-boundaries, but at the same time have been successful in establishing significant collaborative connections as part of their work. As defined by Bruhn and Lewis (1992) the practitioners exhibit the best personal boundaries for collaboration, those that are "strong enough to maintain the integrity of what they contain, but permeable enough to allow transactions to occur" (p. 58).

These findings can also be examined against the description of various boundary characteristic continua advanced by other researchers. Using the flexibility-inflexibility continuum described by Ashforth et al. (2000), this group appears to have somewhat flexible boundaries, where "flexible" refers to the ability and willingness to change or adapt the content of the position and to take on different roles at variable times, places, and situations.

On the permeability-impermeability scale, the group appears to have permeable boundaries, where permeability refers to the ease and openness with which a person can exit a role or move across and between various roles. Petronio et al. (1998) identify that permeability always creates a problem of balance,

between being too rigid and therefore preventing interaction and communication, and being too open and therefore causing confusion and loss of goal and direction (p. 582).

For these practitioners, having solid personal boundaries does not prevent them from being successful collaborators. Understanding their boundaries, both self and positional, enables them to make choices about connectedness and separateness that are appropriate and productive. Rather than being dejobbed in the sense predicted by Bridges (1994), these practitioners are crafting their positions through flexibility and permeability. This skill of job crafting is considered by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) to be a strategic skill enabling employees to change along with the organization. Job crafting envisions the employee as an active participant in shaping the job and its meaning. This concept can quite easily be applied to that of trans-positional spaces, where the spaces become the location where employees craft a job while still having a basic job description to work with.

Boundary Perceptiveness

The term perceptiveness is used here in its common meaning as the capacity to comprehend. Despite the array of boundary related terminology identified by Halley (1995) in developing her lexicon of terms, and others (Ashforth et al., 2000; Collazo-Baker, 2000; McKinney-Dhalenne, 1999), the concept of boundary perceptiveness as identified by this study is not found in the current literature reviewed. The term boundary detection is identified in the work of Halley (1995) but the meaning is somewhat different. She indicates that the term, drawn from communications theory, refers to a visual skill that enables one to determine the outline of a particular body. Wilson et al. (1998) touch on the idea of boundary

perceptiveness when they speak of the need to be aware of boundary rules surrounding the personal issues of others. Lack of such awareness can lead to a failure to understand the possible consequences of action and can result in damaging miscommunication. Hartmann (1997) also argues that an understanding of the role and characteristics of boundaries is useful in the understanding of self and others and that using boundary as a basis for discussion can assist such understandings.

Two important components of this perceptiveness, as identified by this study are (a) understanding the importance and role of positional boundaries and (b) recognizing trans-positional spaces as shared places.

Understanding boundaries.

These participants have developed a balance between the rigid hierarchical nature of their positional boundaries and the flexibility needed to engage with others along or outside their positional boundaries. Their positional boundaries are clear to them. They are able to identify and assess the positional and personal boundary characteristics of others. This perceptiveness allows individuals to move about in the shared spaces without crossing or violating the important boundaries at work in the situation.

The closest idea to this is from Morgan (1998) when he talks about the need for managers to become skilled in the "art of reading organizational life" (p. 4). The participants appear to see positional boundaries as spaces or places of opportunity and interaction, rather than more typically seeing them as barriers that need to be maintained, broken down, dissolved, or permeated (Chagnon, 1997; Bruhn & Lewis, 1992; Bacharach et al., 2000; Halley, 1995). Their perception is most akin to that

provided in the study by Ashforth et al. (2000) who identify boundaries as transitional spaces where activities occur which assist us in changing from one role to another. Their study, however, looked only at the role transitions of individuals and did not examine any interactions between different individuals.

Understanding trans-positional spaces.

It was my intent in this study to look specifically at what happened on the boundaries of positions in collaborative situations. I originally speculated that the nature of student services work requires a collaborative approach in order for holistic strategies to emerge. In Chapter Two, I originally spoke of these spaces as unallocated and undefined. In the process of looking at the results of the study, however, and returning to the literature, I adopted the idea of trans-positional spaces. Support for the existence of such spaces, if not for the name, is clear in the results. The concept of "grey zones" or "shared spaces" that are not the responsibility of any particular position is confirmed in both the conversations about and in the images of collaboration presented by the practitioners. I have not found, however, any confirming or contradicting research. Bridges (1994a) identifies the existence of work that falls outside positional boundaries. He says that "there are always scraps and pieces of work that don't quite fall into anyone's job description" (p. 2). The current study adds the idea that these bits and pieces exist in a space, identified as "trans-positional" space. The use of "trans" in this term is drawn from the common dictionary meaning of "beyond" or "on the other side of." The hyphen is used to distinguish the term from the common meaning of transposition, which implies an exchange of position.

The closest term to the concept of trans-positional space is the idea of "boundarylessness." I agree with Halley's (1995) assessment of that term. In attempting to categorize and define the term, Halley found a quagmire of contradictions about the concept and calls it a "misleading metaphor" (p. 181), justifying why it is not used here. Halley goes on to explain it in several different ways. The closest meaning to trans-positional is her description of boundarylessness as an intentional state where one "would not be protecting turf," (p. 170) but would consciously remove boundaries to obtain higher levels of integration, flexibility, and innovation. Trans-positional space as defined here is not one where boundaries have been removed. It is a shapeless space bounded by the positional boundaries of all the participants in a collaborative situation.

Tactics and Interactions

Tactics

The tactics presented in this study are not unique to boundary management, but are part of the common social and communication concepts within human communications theory and research. What this study does differently is to identify those tools as intentional practices for the development of collaborative relationships within a work environment. The seven tactics identified are used both cyclically and intermittently depending upon the situation. They are presented as a continuum, in concordance with other available studies that use a continuum approach. They were identified in the findings as tactics of stretching, initiating, testing, risk taking, consolidating, committing, and creating.

Few studies identify specific tactics used on or along boundaries. There are none in student services literature, some in organizational literature (Arnold & Clark, 1998; Bacharach et al., 2000; Halley, 1995), and some in communications research (Wilson et al., 1998). Halley (1995) defined tactics as dynamic tools for boundary management, but did not identify what these tactics might be. McKinney-Dhalenne (1999) looks at boundary management as a tactical activity and presents a typology of tactics. Her typology indicates only that tactics are either explicit or implicit (p. 104). Although the tactics identified in this study can be divided into these two categories, the results would not add much to the understanding of their use.

Boundary interactions as continua.

The continuum of interactions presented in the findings (i.e., extensions, conversations, connections, and collaborative engagements) is unique to this study. Several other typologies are available in the literature, most of them also presented as a continuum. The concept of a continuum is a useful model for this study, and perhaps for the others, because it represents the movement toward or away from increasingly integrative activities. Several other models were examined during the process used to develop the categories presented in these findings. None of them are applicable to the findings in this study. The most likely reason for this is the focus of the study. In this study, I am looking at the interactions in the day-to-day work of practitioners. Other studies look at leadership practices (e.g., Bruhn and Lewis, 1992; Collazo-Baker, 2000), human communications (e.g., Petronio et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 1998), and specific groups (e.g., Bacharach et al., 2000; Beal, 1989)

Halley's (1995) typology of boundary spanning activities includes boundary crossing, boundary conversations, boundary work, and boundary bridging. Although I

drew the concept of boundary conversations from her work, the other categories are not applicable to the interactions between positions that I identified.

Like Halley, Collazo-Baker (2000) uses boundary spanning in a broad sense, in a study that describes the boundary spanning activities of school leaders, as they develop collaborative agreements between their school and the external environment. She provides two continua, both related to an organizational context rather than the interpositional context of my study. The first continuum describes progressive strategies for developing partnerships through positioning, protecting, promoting, and partnerships. The second continuum is set within the partnership strategy and includes cooperation, contracting, co-optation, coalition building, and socialization (p. 30). Although the labels applied to these strategies have some commonality of meaning with those I present in this study, I find them to be too oriented to organizational concepts. For example, to describe the process of adding others to the collaboration, Collazo-Baker uses terms such as "contracting," which has legal implications, and "co-optation," which has a sense of assimilation or absorption. I use the terms "connections" and "engagements" which accurately describe the more equitable types of exchange interactions at work in the collaborative activities of the study participants.

None of the continua examined for this study included the idea of boundary extensions as identified in my study. The idea does, however, appear in organizational literature where it most commonly describes organizational citizenship behaviour (Nord & Fox, 1999; Sloat, 1999).

Study Question Five: What terminology and images do practitioners use to express their perceptions of collaborative practice?

The problem of developing a "common language" (Keeling, 2001; Kuh, 1996) with academic divisions and other external organizations is two-fold. In some ways, the educational world has already co-opted the language and practices of business management into institutional practice, a movement not always supported by those within the field (Birnbaum, 2000). In other ways, it becomes crucial to share a common understanding and thus a common terminology if student services practitioners are to develop collaborative engagements with others and particularly with academic divisions.

The challenge in this study is to reflect the meanings intended by the participants in language that will be comfortable to them, and at the same time to present the findings in ways that will be useful in a broader context of student services practice.

As mentioned earlier, I started this study with the intent to more narrowly and clearly define the term collaboration. My personal sense of collaboration is that it is more than cooperating or coordination. It is an integration of interest that does not necessarily result in compromise, but in a synergy that allows for new understandings of issues and new approaches to solutions. This need to clarify was also evident in the work of other researchers (Collazo-Baker, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2000; Riordan, 1996). Cambiano (2000) tries to clarify the term through a continuum that includes the stages of cooperation, coordination, and *true collaboration* (italics mine). He does not, however, provide a clear definition of true collaboration other than to say that it is "highlighted by a more durable relationship between individuals" (p. 131). Instead, he describes this stage by the nature of the activities and

interactions that occur. It was upon reflection of the data emerging that I changed my need and determination to define the term, and instead describe it as the participants use it.

The pervasiveness of the term boundary in a wide range of disciplines and in our day-to-day lives has led to a vast and confusing array of definitions. Therefore in describing the boundary work of the study participants I use wherever possible terms that relate to their own language and the language of the practice.

Although the term boundary extension is not commonly used, the idea is not new. I choose the term "extensions" to draw together and describe those activities that practitioners describe as "pushing," "stretching" and "going the extra mile." Nord and Fox (1999) discuss this phenomenon as an existing concept within organizational citizenship behaviour wherein "individuals may choose to exceed the requirements of their role" and undertake activities that are "neither directly related to individual productivity nor inhering in the enforceable or formal requirements of the individual's role" (p. 155).

Participants, in describing work with their students, frequently use the words "connecting" and "conversing." The concept of boundary conversation is identified as one of many metaphors used within organizational literature and human communications research (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1999, p. 141). Halley (1995) found the term used only twice in her exhaustive review of boundary terminology (p. 77). The term is useful here because it implies sequential and reciprocal interaction between people as they attempt to make sense of responses and to construct mutual understanding.

Blimling et al. (1999) use the metaphor of bridge building to describe the importance of connecting and understanding the perceptions on the other side of the

bridge, in their case, with students. The term seems somewhat suitable for this study, except that it has a sense of physical structure that is more rigid and fixed than the concept needed. The term "connections" is more generic and leaves the nature of the connection open to change and movement.

The term "engaging" is used in the literature in phrases such as "engaging students in active learning" (Blimling et al., 1999, pp. 14, 21), "engaging students in the exploration of solutions" (Blimling et al., p. 27; Sandeen, 1991, p. 46), and "systems of engagement" (Keeling, 2001, p. 5). Engagement has become a more common term in educational literature as a result of the publication of the Kellogg Commission Report in the United States entitled *Returning to Our Roots; the Engaged Institution* (1999).

Two other terms used in this study warrant explanation. The first is the concept "boundary perceptiveness." This term does not show up in Halley's (1995) lexicon; nor do any related terms. Hartmann (1991) suggests the concept when he talks about the importance of the awareness of our own boundary characteristics. Since it emerges as a key skill revealed by the study participants, I see a need for a new boundary concept.

The second term used in the findings is that of "trans-positional spaces." This term is used to describe those spaces that fall outside the boundary spaces of any particular position. Another way to think of this space is as interstitial space, falling between the limits of positions. The concept is firstly based on the understanding that positional descriptions within student services are not contiguous, and on their own, do not cover all the issues that arise.

Additionally this term was extrapolated from the educational literature where the use of the term "transdisciplinary" is beginning to appear more frequently. Some

approaches to collaboration are characterized by role boundaries that remain clearly delineated. All three approaches mentioned here, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary, have a variety of disciplines involved. The difference is in the way that they interact within the collaboration. Transdisciplinary suggests that participants are open to undertaking new roles and to sharing roles with others.

While the term transdisciplinary adequately describes the function and role of individuals in the team, it does not explain the issues related to positional boundaries. To that end, the term "trans-positional" emerges within the findings as a suitable term to describe the phenomenon identified. This term is useful in conveying the understanding that roles within positional boundaries may differ considerably from the role external to the position boundary.

It is important to highlight the boundary concepts and terms that do not get significant use in the conversations with the participants in this study. Several words common to the research and literature on boundaries are not significant to the findings of this study. That may be partly because boundary theory is not yet a conscious framework for student services practice. More importantly, these terms have been so broadly used, in so many different ways, that they become meaningless when describing the specific experiences of these practitioners. The words that are most pervasive are boundary spanning and boundary crossing.

From an organizational theory point of view, interest in boundary concepts has resulted in the new terminology of boundary spanning and the boundaryless organization (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 1995; Halley, 1997; Liedtka et al., 1998). Halley (1995) uses boundary spanning as a key unit of analysis in her development of a lexicon of boundary terminology. Boundary spanning is used primarily in organizational and management literature and most often implies

spanning between units and organizations. Like Halley (1995, p. 145), I find the term to be heavy with implications of power and control. It is advanced as a way to manage across divisions and organizations, and is thus not applicable to the day-to-day practitioner.

In most literature the term spanning is also used interchangeably with the term crossing. Halley (1995) again tries to clarify the term "crossing" by grouping it as one of several boundary spanning actions. The term crossing is not used here because, as pointed out in the literature review, it normally has a sense of moving from ones own boundaries into the boundaries of others, and brings with it negative connotations of power and intrusion. The term implies that the moment individuals step outside their own positional boundary, they cross into the boundary of another. In other words, it implies that boundaries are contiguous. This study's participants do not see boundaries as contiguous. Also, the participants do not cross boundaries into positions of others; neither do they cross ethical boundaries. They instead describe a process of leaving the confines (boundaries) of their own positions and moving into shared spaces where collaboration takes place. These are the trans-positional spaces.

Metaphors: Drawing the Threads Together

This study uses boundary management theory as a framework. Boundary is itself a metaphor. Along with Morgan (1998), Putnam et al. (1999) identify metaphor as a common topic in organizational literature and one that "shapes how we see and make sense of the world by orienting our perceptions, conceptualizations, and understanding of one thing in light of another" (p. 127). The use of metaphor by the participants prompted both a review of the literature, and some thoughtfulness about

the use of metaphors to clarify this study. In struggling to make clear the understandings that I have gained from the participants in this study, I found that metaphor became as natural for me as it appears to be for them.

The literature reviewed for this study is rich with models and metaphoric images of collaboration (Arnold & Clark, 1998; Halley, 1995; Johnston, 1997; Mintzberg et al., 1996; Petronio et al., 1998; Putnam et al., 1999; Trost, 2000). Johnston, in reporting on a collaborative initiative between Ohio State University and several elementary and middle schools in the area, makes extensive use of metaphor. Interspersed throughout the project report are several sections titled "interlude with a metaphor" (pp. 20, 48, 62, 91, 108). Each of these sections provides a different and rich metaphor for the feelings and frustrations of the participants. They are wonderful illustrations of the use of metaphor to explain one thing in terms of another and to amplify the idea of the contradictions of collaboration as indicated in the title of his book. The metaphors used are a changing forest, a hurricane, a house on fire, making muffins from scratch, and learning to ride a bike.

The study findings present three metaphors that are provided by the participants. They are an expanding circle, a round table of equals, and a flower. Since metaphors are part of the language of the participants, it is appropriate to use a metaphor to summarize this chapter. The flower metaphor draws together and summarizes the significant findings of this study.

Interlude with a Metaphor

Think of a college as a daisy. The daisy has a basic structure that can represent the findings related to collaboration and boundary management within college student services practice. Each college has positions, administrative support

systems, and those "left over bits and pieces" described by Bridges (1994). Each daisy has a stem, a sepal, the petals of the corolla, and the centre disk that contains the creative parts of the flower. It is easy to imagine that the petals of the daisy represent the various job positions within the college. Each petal has a clear edge or boundary surrounding it. Each petal is connected to the centre disk along its base, and exchanges nourishment with the core. The disk of the daisy is a trans-petal, or trans-positional, space. It is also possible to imagine the stem and sepal as the organizational and administrative support systems to the disk and petals.

Collaborative activity can be readily visualized as a daisy. "Professional" activity takes place within the petal. While operating within the daisy petal, the incumbent of the position is teaching, counselling, nursing, managing, advising, or one of many different specialties that form part of a college structure. For the most part, the practice within the petal is based on the specific skills and training for the position. When activity occurs near the outer edges of the petal, it is quite clear that the incumbent draws primarily on the specific knowledge related to the position. As activities move the incumbent closer toward the disk, the independence of operation is impacted by the connections to the centre disk. Also near the centre, petals begin to touch and overlap one another. This is when collaboration begins.

Collaboration is a core part of good practice and enhances resulting strategies. Thus, it is important to work both on the petal and in the disk in order to nourish the total health of the flower. For student services practitioners this reflects the need for both common and collaborative approaches to their work. Working in the centre increases wisdom and improves solutions. The strength of the attachment to the core disk space eases the exchange of nourishment. Practitioners also need this strong attachment to the core if they are to move back and forth in the seamless

manner of good practice. The strong attachment prevents the petal from being shriveled through excessive heat and wind. In the same way, individual positions need strong attachment to the rest of the organization.

The daisy also illustrates the fundamentals of collaboration. The four foundational factors of trust, self-confidence, care, and valuing are the nutrients that keep the daisy healthy. Those nutrients come from all parts of the flower (the stem, the petals, and the disk) and are garnered from the rain, the sunshine, and the soil. A self-confident petal can turn into the sun and rain to gather more strength, and then share that strength with others. This self-confidence and trust is nurtured by a healthy and creative trans-positional space.

A strong and supportive stem and sepal are important to the survival of the daisy. In the same way, a supportive leadership enhances the growth of collaboration in the college. In the daisy, all petals have an equal attachment to, and access into, the creative centre. So too, strong collaborations involve an eclectic group of expertise with parity among members in order to achieve the richest result.

The daisy reflects the boundary management concepts from the study. The strong, but permeable attachment between each petal and the centre disk reflects the boundary characteristics of the outstanding practitioners who are part of this study. Although the petals of the flower share some characteristics that are reflective of a daisy, each petal on the flower has some unique features. There is flexibility in the shape of the petal. Likewise, these outstanding practitioners are crafters of their own shape, making decisions about the content and context of their work based on the situation. They are aware of the position and function of the other "petals and parts" of the college. This is boundary perceptiveness, or perhaps "corolla" perceptiveness.

As practitioners work on and along the boundaries of their positionary petal, they use a variety of tactics as they interact for the purpose of establishing connections with other petals. These tactics of stretching, initiating, testing, risking, consolidating, committing, and creating are used within the continuum of boundary interactions presented in this study.

Boundary extensions occur when the incumbent decides to bring onto the petal some task or role that is not normally there. This would have the effect of stretching the size or shape of the petal, but would likely not have much affect on the surrounding petals. Thus the petal occupant may exceed, and thus extend, the requirements of the role of the petal.

Boundary conversations occur between the petals. They may happen when the wind blows (crises, challenges) and disturbs the petals in such a way that they touch where they have not touched previously. More often, conversations are the intentional initiating or testing tactics taken along the edges of the petal, as the occupant "talks" to and thus touches another petal. These touches are not permanent, and may not reoccur if the reciprocal conversation is judged to be unproductive.

Boundary connections also occur across petals, as a two-way process. The intent is to commit to a viable and more permanent connection to the other petal, and to establish a position-to-position relationship. Such connections can be risky, if there is not a reciprocal intent. The connection could result in a loss of respect and confidentiality. These connections are intended to be permanent so that information and ideas can flow back and forth with ease. These connections enhance the ability of students to move from service to service in a seamless and effective way.

As connections are consolidated, the nature of the interaction deepens to an engagement level. Collaborative engagements do not occur in the petals, but in the disk. In order to become fully engaged, the petal incumbent must be willing and able to move out into the centre of the flower. The centre of the flower is the trans-positional space, the grey zone, the shared space. This involves a transition from the fairly structured and defined position on the petal to the trans-positional space where the individual may enact a variety of roles. It is important to reiterate that engagement does not involve crossing into the boundaries of other positions. As in the daisy, it is in the middle of the flower where the greatest creativity and learning occurs.

The overall health and growth of the daisy can be visualized as the student learning and development that results when creative collaborative initiatives form part of an outstanding student services practice.

CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter presents an overview of the study, a summary of the findings, the subsequent conclusions drawn, recommendations for practice and further research, and my personal reflections. The chapter is divided into five parts. The first provides an overview of the purpose, significance, and methodology of the research study. The second part provides a summary of the findings as they relate to the research questions identified in Chapter One. Part three presents the conclusions drawn from the study and relates them to the findings. Part four presents recommendations for applications to the practice of student services in two-year colleges, as well as identifying issues for further research. Finally, I included my personal reflections on the research process and my own interlude with a metaphor.

Overview of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to improve understanding of the collaborative practices of exemplary student services personnel in two-year colleges in Alberta. That understanding is developed through an examination of the day-to-day experiences and practices of selected practitioners. Specifically, the study examines how these practitioners work within, between, and across the boundaries of their positions. The focus is on the interactions that occur when collaborative endeavours require some stretching or modifying of positional boundaries.

Significance

Until recently, the existing research in the field of student services has predominantly, and understandably, concentrated on students, student outcomes, best practices, administrative issues, and student development theory. Furthermore, the research is primarily quantitative, overwhelmingly American, and focused on four-year institutions. This study is significant in its concentration on the day-to-day experiences of student services practitioners in two-year colleges in Alberta.

By examining day-to-day experiences, the study accomplishes two significant things. First, it gives voice to experience and wisdom that has until now been silent, not because of its insignificance but because the two-year college work environment in Alberta does not often provide time and space for research and writing on practice. Second, by using boundary management theory as a lens, it provides some practical ideas that may be of use in future collaborative practice for both front-line practitioners and administrators. These improved practices may, in turn, support enhanced environments for student learning and development.

Method

The eight study participants were selected through a purposive sampling approach. They were selected from a published list of Alberta practitioners identified by their provincial colleagues, by students, and by supervisors as being outstanding practitioners.

This qualitative study began with conversational interviews utilizing flexible, open-ended questions related to broad areas of exploration. I transcribed the initial interviews personally. Participants also completed the Hartmann Boundary

Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) on their own time and mailed the results to me in a pre-paid envelope, thus maintaining confidentiality with respect to respondent scores. Interview data were then coded through an open coding process followed by axial coding using both inductive and deductive analyses. I presented the analysis results to an auditor for the purpose of interrogating and verifying the open coding terminology and the initial phase of axial coding. I maintained a research log throughout, a process that proved invaluable many times during the research project. The log contained my impressions of each interview as well as my thoughts, concerns, questions, and frustrations throughout the process.

Once the data were analyzed and the findings written, a final audit was conducted that followed through the process from data analysis to findings. At this point, I also began the member checking. Some checking was done in person, some on the telephone, and some via email. Again, the feedback proved valuable from both these validation processes. A major part of the process was determining the best way to present the findings within the various chapters of the thesis in order to give the richest picture possible.

Summary of Findings

The 22 emergent findings of this research are presented here as they relate to and inform the five original research questions.

Study Question One: How do these outstanding practitioners see the role and function of collaboration within student services practice?

Participants' experiences in a range of collaborative situations are reflected in the following six findings.

Finding 1. Participants use the term "collaboration" to describe a wide range of interactions with others.

Participants' stories of collaborative practice include situations that involve the simple exchange of information, cooperative efforts in the completion of a project, and ongoing informal interactions with colleagues. They also describe experiences where the interactions with others involve the exchange of information, ideas, and opinions at a high level of trust and confidence, and where collective strategies are developed. This dissertation, because of its intent to reflect the experience and voice of the practitioner, uses the term collaboration in the broad sense that the study participants apply it.

Finding 2. Collaboration is perceived as core to exceptional student services practice.

The participants in this study value collaboration as an important part of their work. They identify several benefits in working closely with others in situations that do not fall neatly within the boundaries of a particular position. Finding an improved strategy for student issues is the key purpose for collaborative initiatives. Collaboration is seen as the underlying principle in all student services practice and as an essential feature of quality practice. Collaborative approaches work well to

address complex and serious issues and prove useful in the early identification of emerging issues.

Finding 3. Collaboration improves student services practice.

Respondents identify that collaboration results in benefits to their own practice and to improved strategies for students. Working together enables a mixture of expertise, experience, and perspective to be brought to bear on an issue or problem. Other benefits mentioned are improved wisdom for the future, greater efficiency in handling issues, more effective solutions, better decisions, and greater creativity.

Finding 4. Outstanding practitioners describe a seamless transition between common practice and collaborative practice.

Although collaboration is core to their practice, these practitioners also value and utilize the approach identified in Chapter Three as common practice. This is sometimes referred to as the "in-office" approach even though many practitioners do not work in offices. Stories of practice often segue from common practice stories occurring within their own offices to stories of collaborative practice and back again in a manner that indicates that these practitioners use both approaches as part of total practice. A similar sense of seamlessness arises in the descriptions surrounding the role of practice in student learning and development and in the reflective, evaluative processes by which practitioners assess the outcomes of their work.

Finding 5. Collaboration is centred on student outcomes.

To suggest that student services practice is centred on the student is to state the obvious. It is important to note that although collaboration is seen by these participants to be both effective and efficient, the main purpose of collaboration is to improve the results for the students, by determining the best approach to a situation or challenge. Throughout the study, student learning and development emerge as the primary outcome of collaboration.

Finding 6. Practitioners use personal and group feedback to improve their practice.

The most valued forms of feedback on their performance for these participants are their personal reflections and the feedback from students, families, and other practitioners. Participants describe a process of constant self-assessment of their strategies that results in constant learning and development. Feedback from other members of the collaboration and de-briefings are also vital to their practice. Did it work for the student? Why didn't it? Why did I do/say that? What might have worked better? Did it move the student along toward her or his goal? The descriptions here do not distinguish between common and collaborative practice. Participants speak equally and integratedly of learning from one another and from self-reflection. In all cases, there are also quantitative, institutional forms of evaluation undertaken, but these are not identified as being of equal importance to the individual practitioner.

Study Question Two: What factors do these practitioners perceive to be important to a successful collaborative approach to student services?

If, as identified in question one, collaboration is core to quality practice, one logical next step is to identify factors supportive of successful collaborative initiatives. The results of that step are reflected in four findings related to factors that are either contributing or constraining to successful collaboration.

Finding 7. These practitioners identify four foundational factors for collaborative success. These are trust, self-confidence, an ethic of care, and validation of others.

Participants anticipate that all those entering a successful collaborative situation will demonstrate the four basic qualities of trustworthiness, self-confidence, an ethic of care, and a commitment to valuing the role and contribution of others. These are seen as essential to successful collaborative work, in part because they lead to improved information sharing and mutual respect.

Finding 8. Four other factors considered important to good collaboration are shared understandings, good judgement, good communication, and supportive leadership.

The factor of shared understandings highlights that practitioners need to share an understanding of the importance of a holistic approach to student learning, and the responsibility of everyone in the college to contribute to student learning. Learning and development occur best when an intentionally holistic approach is taken to the situation of the student both in and out of class.

Practitioners identify the need for the constant exercise of good judgement in the assessment of particular situations and issues that arise during their day-to-day work. The judgement process is one of assessing what expertise is needed to address the situation, followed by an implementation strategy based on knowing where that expertise exists within the organization or the community.

All participants mention a third important factor. Where it might result in an improved outcome, a willingness to communicate information at a level of confidence that may strain the boundaries of confidentiality is seen by all participants as essential to the process.

Finally, although not an essential factor, these participants identify that positive leadership support can greatly enhance successful collaboration initiatives.

Finding 9. The practitioners identify six characteristics that contribute to successful student services collaborations.

Purpose. The purpose of the collaboration is to determine the best strategies in a process that will hear different viewpoints, assess available information, form options, develop logistics for actions, assess the results, and change or realign strategies as necessary.

Knowledge sharing. Participants view the sharing of information as vital to "looking after students correctly" and as assurance that an important part of the big picture is not missing. The kind of information shared at this level is not necessarily details about a particular student. As importantly, it involves sharing of knowledge about the best approaches to particular situations. By sharing knowledge, practitioners learn how to improve the collective approach.

Collective strategies. Strategies developed in collaboration are not professional strategies for counsellors or instructors, or advisors or job placement officers. Professionals are not being told how to do their work. Instead, the result is collective strategies to address an issue. While members of the collaboration are undertaking these strategies, the professional(s) who may have been dealing with a specific issue will continue to determine their own in-office approach to the situation. That approach will be tempered, enhanced, and supported by the more collective strategies that have been agreed upon. Understanding the collaborative strategy helps all staff who have contact with the student to support the strategy rather than take actions that might interfere with the strategy.

A safe space. The shared collaborative space is viewed by the participants as a place where they can share ideas without fear of being betrayed or dismissed. There is a feeling of freedom with respect to the expression of ideas. This sense of safety is considered to be vital. This is illustrated throughout the study by constant participant references to trust and validation.

Equality within an eclectic membership. The membership in any particular initiative is most frequently on a need and knowledge basis. In more complex situations, the group includes whoever can contribute to facilitating solutions and whoever has a productive connection to the student. The emphasis is not on authority or rank, but on whom had the most useful ideas. There is a parity of relationship that does not necessarily exist outside the collaboration.

Informality. Collaboration is normally informal, although a formal meeting might be part of the process. Participants describe a variety of formats where dynamic interactions take place both formally and informally; where communication and consultation, not format, are key.

Finding 10. Participants identify several constraints to successful collaboration.

All study participants have had experiences with, and comments about, the barriers to collaborative practice. Many of these comments are the antithesis of those behaviours that relate to positive collaboration: lack of trust, care, validation, and self-confidence. Participants describe several other factors that can negatively affect the quality of the solutions in complex problems. These concerns, identified by several participants, can be grouped into seven broad themes. They are (a) power issues, (b) personal arrogance, (c) professional ethics used as an excuse, (d) "black and white" attitudes, (e) divergent values, (f) impact of budget cuts, and (g) unclear or unsupportive organizational messages.

Study Question Three: How does collaborative practice impact college student learning and development?

Four findings reflect the understandings gained from the experiences of the participants in this study.

Finding 11. Student success means student learning and development.

To these participants, student success means student learning and development. There is strong agreement among the participants that the core role of student services is student learning and development. They all describe student learning outside the classroom as both complementary and foundational to classroom learning. Participants identify seven elements that are part of a student's learning and development at college, and that are consistent with those identified by

the Conference Board of Canada (2000). Students do not always get what they want or asked for, from the participants in this study. What a student learns is more important than whether the student is happy with an outcome.

These practitioners seek to provide a safe and confidential environment for students to develop self-awareness of their strengths, their weaknesses, their preferences, and their career and lifestyle choices. Participants expect that the student will be active in issue resolution and problem solution. The participants describe the role of the practitioner as one of support and mentorship, but also one that establishes high expectations for student responsibility.

Finding 12. Participants equate personal success to student learning and development.

The practitioners who were part of this study use internal, personal criteria as success measures, even though all of them provide information for external reporting purposes. The single most important measure of success is the personal satisfaction of seeing students grow and learn.

Finding 13. Successful collaboration means working with a wide variety of individuals and organizations.

These practitioners understand that collaborative interactions with a variety of others are important to finding the best strategies. Practitioners speak of working with a variety of individuals and organizations outside the boundaries of their particular administrative units and external to the college. The approach is to include "whoever needs to be there," including such groups as clergy, police, social workers,

parents, security staff, emergency medical staff, senior administrators, or hospital staff.

Finding 14. Collaboration with classroom faculty is key to student learning and development but is not yet as good as it should be.

Although these practitioners see collaboration with classroom faculty as key to a successful approach to issues not bounded within any particular job, they are also very aware that attitude, structures, and values of teaching faculty may be different from their own. Several mention that classroom faculty see them as "crying towels" for students.

If student services practitioners want their role to be recognized and valued, practitioners need to respect and value the role and authority of faculty and to recognize the importance of the related boundary issues. Participants identify the need to take collaborative approaches to issues impacting the classroom by involving classroom faculty in follow-up communication, if not in the solution. It is vital for the student services practitioner to have a full picture of how the issue is impacting the classroom and to both gather and share information with the classroom faculty early in the process.

Study Question Four: What boundary management strategies and tactics do these individuals use as they work collaboratively within, along, and outside of their positional boundaries?

When the collaborative experiences of the participants are analyzed through the lens of boundary management theory, seven findings emerge to describe how these practitioners work at, along, or outside the boundaries of their positions.

Finding 15. These practitioners have strong personal boundaries.

The overall totals for the group ranged from 233 to 268 on the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991). Hartmann identified extreme thinness as above 351 and extreme thickness as below 195 with the mean being 273 plus/minus 52. Thus, the boundaries of the participants in the present study are consistently thick, consistently below (thicker than) the mean score identified by Hartmann, but not in the extreme range. Yet, solid personal boundaries do not prevent these practitioners managing their boundaries for effective collaborative practice.

Finding 16. These practitioners exhibit flexibility and permeability on their positional boundaries and the ability to creatively craft their own positions.

The participants have a personal and professional orientation to their work that supports both individual and collaborative approaches requiring a high level of flexibility and permeability in positional boundaries. Flexibility refers to the ability and willingness to change or adapt the content of the positions and to take on different roles in a variety of times, space, or situations. Participants also exhibit role flexibility while involved in collaborative situations, often accepting a task, job, or role that is

not normally part of their position. In a collaborative situation, these practitioners speak of assuming whatever role is appropriate for the situation. They may have a leadership role as a result of their position, but within the collaboration, they may not play that role. Most of the respondents have experienced significant boundary change in their positions, through institutional re-organization and through their own developing expertise and networks. They are able to balance the necessary maintenance of their positional boundaries with the need for boundary adjustment and change

These participants display a significant degree of permeability in their positional boundaries. Permeability refers to the ease with which a person can exit a role or move across and between various roles. They appear to have found a balance between being too rigid and therefore preventing interaction, communication, and new approaches to solutions, and being too open and therefore causing confusion, loss of goal and direction, and ethical violations.

Finding 17. These practitioners have a boundary perceptiveness that enables them to understand the role and importance of boundaries.

There is agreement among the practitioners on the need for, and importance of, boundaries and the potential dangers associated with ignoring boundaries. They recognize that trying to do the professional work of others is neither appropriate nor ethical. At the same time, the practitioners see boundaries not as barriers, but as spaces where interactions could occur. They have a clear perception of the difference between appropriate boundaries and when boundaries become a barrier to success. These outstanding practitioners have an understanding of the boundary rules and limits surrounding their own practice and that of others. They understand

the boundary culture within their unit and their college. They know when and when not to stretch boundaries. Every participant speaks of the importance of confidentiality in handling student information carefully and respectfully, using terms such as "crucial" and "sacrosanct" to describe the trust they hold. All can describe the difficulty of decisions they sometimes have to make with reference to sharing sensitive and confidential information. Yet all recognize the importance of the sharing of high level information in certain situations.

Finding 18. These practitioners are aware of the existence and the importance of trans-positional spaces.

Participants show an understanding that positional boundaries are seldom, if ever, contiguous, leaving spaces where a blend of expertise is needed. They use a variety of descriptive terms and metaphors to describe this space, which I have labeled as "trans-positional" space. The size, shape, and content of these trans-positional spaces may change with organizational and staff change, but they always exist. These practitioners view the trans-positional space as an area for shared responsibility and action, and where creative strategies are often developed.

Participants identified that many student issues span a wide range of professional expertise and thus fall outside the realm of any particular positional boundary. Although each practitioner may be able to address part of an issue, strategic approaches to such issues are best developed together in the shared spaces that exist between job descriptions, the trans-positional space. It is in these areas that the "big picture," the "collective vision," can assist in improved strategies. These outstanding practitioners accept the need to work collaboratively in shared spaces for the best results, even though working in those spaces can be difficult.

Finding 19. These practitioners use a variety of tactics as they interact on their boundaries.

The activities and actions found within the conversations with these practitioners reveal a variety of tactics that are used along their positional boundaries. Seven tactical categories describe various boundary activities used in moving toward a particular collaborative involvement. The seven categories identified are stretching, initiating, testing, risking, consolidating, committing, and creating. These categories imply a continuum of action that move a participant toward or away from a more intense level of boundary interaction.

Finding 20. As they work on, along, and outside the boundary of their positions, these practitioners use four types of boundary interactions that form a continuum.

The aggregation of the data from this study is presented as a proposed typology of four boundary interactions that can be seen as a loose continuum, reflective of how these practitioners manage their positional boundary relationships. These are not rigid categories nor is the continuum necessarily fixed. The proposed typology of interactions includes (a) boundary extensions, (b) boundary conversations, (c) boundary connections, and (d) collaborative engagements. Some of these categories relate to those proposed by other researchers. These particular labels have been chosen because they more closely represent both the experiences of these practitioners and the language of student services.

Study Question Five: What terminology and images do practitioners use to express their perceptions of collaborative practice?

Finding 21. Practitioners do not always use the current terminology of collaboration or boundary management theory. Yet their descriptions of collaborative activity fit well within the language of both theories.

The language used by participants is that of their day-to-day experiences. The terminology and labels used in this study are often found embedded within the descriptions of the participants' collaborative activities. Terms such as extensions, conversations, and connections were drawn from their comments. In other cases, new labels such as trans-positional spaces were needed to ensure common understanding of the ideas they were expressing through the use of common terms such as "grey areas."

Finding 22. Participants use metaphors in describing their student services experiences.

Study participants use three distinct metaphors to describe collaborative practice. A successful collaboration is viewed as an expanding circle of involvement. The second image is that of a round table of equals. The third image is of a flower. Each image illustrates how these participants visualize collaboration.

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest eight general conclusions descriptive of outstanding student services practice in two-year colleges in Alberta. A ninth

conclusion arises from the research process itself. The applicability of these conclusions to other situations is possible, but would need to be validated in further research.

Conclusion 1

The understandings with respect to the role and function of student services as demonstrated by the outstanding Alberta practitioners in this study are generally consistent with the current literature of theory and practice in the field (Findings 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13). Their practice is student centred, holistic, reflective, collaborative, and focused on the development of intentional strategies that enhance student learning and development. Student learning and development is identified as the key purpose of practice. Exceptional practitioners combine common and collaborative approaches to their practice and are able to move back and forth between the two approaches in an apparently seamless manner.

Conclusion 2

Collaboration is an essential part of exceptional student services practice. Collaboration improves practice and increases the quality and consistency of collective strategies (Findings 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 14). Practitioners have participated in successful collaborative initiatives with a wide variety of other groups. At the same time they recognize that they still have significant challenges in developing seamless learning environments in collaboration with classroom faculty.

Conclusion 3

Collaboration can be enhanced or inhibited by the attitudes and skills of participants, and by some shared understandings about the characteristics of the collaboration (Findings 7, 8, 9, 10). Four foundational factors of trust, self-confidence, care, and validation of others are identified as the most important supportive factors. Other factors are shared understandings, good judgement, good communication, and supportive leadership. Constraining factors are power issues, personal arrogance, rigid attitudes, divergent values, heavy workloads, and unclear messages from the organization level. Collaborative initiatives need to have some degree of intrinsic structure that are understood and shared. The participants in this study identify six important characteristics underpinning successful collaborations. These include (a) improved strategies as a purpose, (b) high level of information sharing, (c) collective strategy development, (d) freedom of expression without fear of betrayal, (e) eclectic and equal membership, and (f) informality.

Conclusion 4

A combination of solid personal boundaries, with flexible and permeable positional boundaries, provides a productive balance of structure and freedom conducive to successful collaboration in student services. Exemplary practitioners use creative job crafting to address issues that reside in the trans-positional spaces (Findings 4, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18). Solid personal boundaries help prevent ethical boundary violations and maintain self-confidence. The flexibility and permeability of positional boundaries are necessary to encourage creative collaborative solutions to

complex issues. Participants have the confidence to adjust and redefine their positional boundaries in a creative response to issues that require holistic solutions.

Conclusion 5

The understanding of boundaries as transitional spaces that are thresholds for interaction brings with it an ambiguity that can create confusion. Perceptiveness about boundaries is a key collaborative skill, and can be developed through an understanding of boundary issues such as personal boundary thickness and thinness, and permeability and flexibility of positional boundaries (Findings 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20). Solid personal boundaries need to be accompanied by a high level of awareness about the characteristics, role, and importance of the boundaries of others and of institutional rules surrounding boundaries. This awareness helps practitioners manage their own boundaries, be aware of when their boundary activity may create problems of territoriality and conflict, and recognize where boundary activity can be productive and creative.

Conclusion 6

The concept of trans-positional spaces as a site for collaborative practice has the potential to clarify understandings and to provide the best balance between the necessary structure and limits of positional roles and the benefits to be gained from working outside those limits (Findings 9, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 21). Boundary concepts are sometimes uncomfortable because they imply a sense of conflict through the use of concepts such as crossing, breaking, and invading the territories of others. The identification of the semi-structured, trans-positional spaces helps alleviate these

concerns. The successful collaborative practices identified in this study are not "boundaryless," but are governed by important characteristics that contribute understanding of role and function for the participants, without appearing to inhibit improved strategies and solutions. Using the idea of trans-positional spaces gives the necessary structure while encouraging a less structured approach. As such it may prove a useful concept for managing a move towards less hierarchical organizational approaches.

Conclusion 7

The metaphor of boundary and its related concepts can be a practical and understandable way to assist in the development of collaborative skills and initiatives for both managers and practitioners in student services (Findings 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20). These skills are likely to become important as organizations move toward more virtual and less hierarchical structures. Organizations without some sense of structure and process have not yet proved to be successful. It is likely that some structure will remain as organizations struggle to find ways to address major issues and to encourage creativity. Individuals not related via the hierarchy need to be able to work together on common issues and shared goals. The boundary metaphor can help us understand how people interact and communicate with others, as well as assist in our own self-awareness. Development and use of metaphors of collaboration and of boundary may prove to be a useful tool for practitioners and administrators.

Conclusion 8

The current terminology of boundary theory has emerged from a wide variety of disciplines and is changing as the theory itself develops. This can cause confusion in meanings and understandings. For that reason, it is important that the terminology of this study be chosen or developed to be understandable within student services theory and practice (Findings 1, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20). Within the study, the terms 'collaboration," "learning," and "development" are used in a manner reflective of the use given them by the participants. The definitions of "flexibility" and "permeability," though widely used in the literature, are refined here to relate to positional boundaries. The labels of "boundary perceptiveness" and "trans-positional space" are designed to represent phenomena not reflected in other research. The labels applied to the interaction continuum are chosen to reflect how these practitioners approach collaboration, because other typologies have been developed from other disciplines which are not related enough to be useful. Finally, the potential use of the word "transfer" to describe the process that is commonly called "refer" is hinted at, but not fully addressed in this study.

Conclusion 9

One of the difficulties encountered in this study is the lack of related research and writing from within student services practice. The concentration of research has been on students and on administration, and not on the day-to-day practice. There is also a significant amount of research and study within each of the disciplines that most frequently compose a student services operation. Additionally, the literature is predominately American. If college student services are to meet the learning and

development needs of students in the holistic manner basic to good practice, they need to know more about successful integrative, collaborative day-to day practice of student services.

Recommendations

The findings and subsequent conclusions of this study lead to the following recommendations for further study, for practice, and for higher education.

Recommendations for Further Study

The dearth of research related to student services practice in Alberta, and in Canada, leaves scope for further study so broad that it is impossible to include them all here. So much is needed.

Seven recommendations are made with respect to the findings of this particular study.

1. There is a need to confirm, adjust, or contradict the characteristics and content of the boundary tactics and interactions identified as descriptive of the practice of study participants and to assess the transferability of the concepts to a broader range of practitioners. This could involve the testing of the boundary continuum with a wider audience of outstanding practitioners through questionnaires or focus groups. A case study approach to a successful initiative within a two-year college could also provide further clarification of the continuum model. An approach that asks specific questions about boundary issues would draw out information that this study, with its indirect approach did not.

2. There is a need to pursue the concept of trans-positional spaces as a label descriptive of the shared spaces accessed via permeable positional boundaries. The idea of trans-positional spaces as extra-positional areas where collaborative engagement can occur appears to be new to the literature. The idea, if not the term, appears to be intuitive to the practitioners in this study. Its potential usefulness will need to be confirmed by significant and specific follow-up studies that ask direct questions about working outside positional boundaries. The existence and nature of trans-positional spaces may be most logically pursued through theories from organizational theories such as that of organizational citizenship behaviour. Examining how practitioners attitudes toward citizenship relate to their collaborative skills could prove very applicable, especially because citizenship skills are among those listed as essential for students to develop.
3. The factors and characteristics identified as underpinning or constraining successful collaborations need to be specifically addressed for usability and completeness with the intent to develop a useful model for student services practice. This study resulted in a very preliminary picture of such factors and characteristics. Particularly, it did not attempt to present a full picture of the barriers that exist within the culture and history of the practice that may be inhibiting to collaborative approaches.

   This study presented a preliminary model of practice that did not adequately reflect the seamless manner in which these participants moved from common to collaborative practice. Further development of the model would best be done through focus groups and direct discussions with experienced practitioners.
4. There is a need to look at all of the findings of this study through the framework of other theories and standpoints, and through the use of both qualitative and

quantitative methods. Existing guidelines such as the *Principles of Good Practice* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997), the powerful partnership guidelines developed by Schroeder (2001), or the Conference Board of Canada's (2000) employability skills could form the basis of studies that look at the impact of collaboration on student learning and development. Action research has been identified as one logical approach to examining practice.

5. There is a need to further develop, adapt, and adopt the language of boundary and collaboration into meaningful terminology for student services practice. While there might be merit in using universally understood terminology, in practice that is seldom possible. Professional language is so imbued with local meaning by the environment in which it is used, that it usually is not a meaningfully transfer. The new terminology advanced by this study needs to be refined, adjusted, or disputed. A common vision is needed if there is to be collaboration between academic and student services units where there is currently a cultural gap.
6. It has been argued that boundary perceptiveness and an understanding of self-boundaries is an important skill in successful collaborations. The current study used the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) in a very generic manner, and with a very small audience. Still the results were interesting. If the boundary metaphor is to be fully useful, there is a need to test the HBQ in much more depth and breadth to see if it will provide useful insights to individuals about their self-boundaries. If it does not prove useful, then there is a need to develop such a tool, preferably one that is applicable to self and positional boundaries and is also understandable to the ordinary practitioner.

7. During the course of this study, many of the ideas and questions emerged that need exploration in order to provide a fuller picture of successful collaborative practice in Alberta. Some specific questions suggested for future research are:
    - How do practitioners' perceptions of their positional boundaries relate to their collaborative ability?
    - How do boundary conversations, connections, and engagements occur in online collaboration initiatives?
    - How can metaphors assist in developing shared understandings about collaboration?
    - Can boundary management approaches as developed in this study help develop skills that will shorten the time taken to reach the collaborative engagement stage?
    - What factors contribute to the seamless approach to practice demonstrated by the participants in this study?
    - How does the seamlessness practice exhibited by the practitioners in this study develop? How does seamlessness enhance practice?
    - How well does the term "transfer" describe the process traditionally called "referral," by which practitioners ensure that students are receiving the best possible service?
    - What barriers exist to collaborative practice in student services in two-year colleges?
    - What models of assessment will help identify the benefits to the student of collaborative practices?
    - What approaches to collaboration between academic and student services units are most effective in supporting student learning and development?

- How effective is collaboration as an approach to campus crises?

Recommendations for Practice

This study is the first of its kind in Alberta and as such, its findings are so preliminary that it is difficult to say what might work in practice without a significant amount of concept testing. As such the recommendations here are regrettably few. I expect that the findings may be applicable in related areas such as public schools and four-year institutions. However, its applicability beyond the two-year college has not been addressed here.

1. Boundary management theory holds potential for improving student services practice. These skills enhance collaboration and collaboration is core to good practice. Therefore, student services practitioners in two-year colleges need to develop their boundary skills if they are to work most effectively in collaboration with others, an approach that is obviously needed to develop the best college environment for student learning and development. They need to understand their own boundary perceptiveness and self-awareness. Since these practitioners primarily learn through reflection on practice, they will need to consciously address boundary issues that arise during collaborative initiatives. One effective way would be through an action research approach to a campus issue. For most practitioners this would require a specific professional development initiative to learn more about the action research model.
2. Student services managers who see collaboration as core to good practice need to become familiar with the potential of boundary management concepts and select and apply those ideas and practices that are useful within student services practice. They should intentionally provide opportunity and time for the

practitioners in their colleges to gain an understanding of boundary issues through discussions of boundary concepts and by providing opportunities for professional development. The findings of this study could serve as a starting place for student services departments to develop their own boundary practices and guidelines for collaboration. Ensuring that debriefing sessions occur after specific collaborative initiatives could provide an opportunity to discuss boundary issues with practitioners.

3. Practitioners need to be conscious of the power of terminology and metaphor to convey their meanings and messages to others within the college. Using shared terms like student learning and development could assist understanding during boundary conversations with others not familiar with student services. Additionally, the use of metaphors in presentations to students, parents, and others within the institution could help explain the essence of student services practice to others. Such shared understandings are essential in developing collaborative approaches that can enhance the strategies for student learning and development.
4. If collaboration is core to good student services practice, then college evaluation systems must find a way to assess and reward collaboration as part of staff evaluation processes.

Recommendation for Higher Education

Although the study targeted student services practitioners in two-year colleges, one obvious issue was the lack of research related to any student services practice in Alberta and in Canada. This is likely because there are no specific graduate programs related to student services practice within higher education

programs in Canadian universities, as there are in the United States. Although some programs have individual courses, usually offered as part of counselling specialties, the current situation means that no practitioner can undertake a graduate degree in student services within Canada. In my own case, I was fortunate that my experience in the field gave me much of the background needed to pursue this research study at the doctoral level. Additionally the program at the University of Alberta had the flexibility to allow for my interests, and I was able to find a supervisor whose expertise in collaboration supported and nurtured this study. Despite my good fortune, there is an obvious need for a graduate degree program in student services practice and administration in Canada.

Most student services practitioners enter the field, often accidentally, via a specific professional or positional route such as nurse, advisor, recreation specialist, housing manager, or counsellor. Some grow into administrative positions without any of the transdisciplinary training necessary for best practice. A graduate program would need to be designed much like an MBA or an LLB to provide both comprehensive administration and leadership training and targeted training for student services for a multidisciplinary incoming student body. Although the need is great, it is likely that the lack of a critical mass of students has meant that the program is not viable in the current environment.

The most logical place for such a program would be within a faculty that has doctoral programs within higher education. A student services program could draw on courses in educational administration, adult education, and educational psychology. The problem of student numbers suggests that the program might best be a collaborative one between several institutions. Additionally, the program could draw on existing programs in the United States through distance initiatives.

Personal Reflections

Like others, I began this research journey surrounded and supported by a community of scholars who shared their wisdom and advice. There was a cohort of other students who shared the same goals, a supervisor who advised and supported me, and a wealth of literature about the research process. In some ways, everything one needs to know about the research process is already known and available. Yet, the experience of the doctoral dissertation is intensely personal and often solitary. Therefore, it is perhaps appropriate that I add the thoughts that are most significant in my journey to date.

1. The experience of conversing with the outstanding practitioners who were part of this study was the most rewarding part of the process. That experience both confirmed and reinforced my respect and admiration for their dedication to students and to their institutions, for their wisdom and understanding of student services, and for their continuous desire for learning and improving their practice. Even more important, I believe that the knowledge and practice that these exemplary practitioners exhibited and which are reflected through the boundary management concepts presented here are basic and timeless skills needed for a workplace impacted by technology and change.
2. The determination to begin the process of recording that wisdom kept me going through the process. So many times early in the process, I was advised to pick a topic that I really cared about in order to be sustained through the process. These participants and the students they engaged were my sustaining factor. Unfortunately, in any dissertation, there is the need to bracket and limit the findings to a presentable amount. As a result, there is much wisdom that could

still be drawn from the data of this study, and even more from the participants and others like them in the practice.

3. Throughout this process, I was continually struck by the irony of my collaborative topic and my non-collaborative research method. I could not have done this particular task differently, but the potential is tremendous for a more collaborative approach to research in the future. In retrospect, an action research approach would have had the potential for a more collaborative approach.
4. As I read the research and literature related to my task, I often contacted the researchers and writers who were key to my study, tracking them down at institutions, agencies, and cottages, and sending them emails. I was constantly amazed by the quick and supportive responses I received from outstanding researchers, practitioners, and administrators who were interested in my task. The use of technology enhanced the research process through providing access to the support of an e-community of practice from across North America.
5. This study has improved my research and writing skills, and clarified and expanded my own understandings about student services practice. It has added to my ability to use new language to explain the essence of student services practice to other practitioners and, more importantly, to those who still equate student services with "counselling." If I were to start again, I might have asked different questions, and used different approaches, but I only know that as a result of using the approach I did. There is so much more to research and record, that I am left with a desire to keep exploring student services practice in two-year colleges. I hope the opportunity to do so is in my future. And finally, I am left with my own metaphor of student services practice.

Interlude with a Metaphor: Leftover Cookie Dough:

Reflections on Student Services Management

I like to think of the student services function as cookie dough, with the cookie cutters as the various positions or people available to accomplish the function. If I am lucky enough to be starting from scratch, there are many possible recipes to use, or I can create my own. There are some basics needed in all cookies (the flour, the sugar, the liquid, the flavour), but it is possible to be creative about the other ingredients, such as chips, raisins, or M&Ms. It is also possible to create a disaster, if there is no thought, limit, or balance to the ingredients.

Once the dough is made, I begin the task of managing by rolling out the dough to the desired thickness. I know that if the dough is rolled too thin, I will be unable to move the cut cookies onto the cookie sheet. Or, if I can move them, they may still break or crumble too easily after being cooked. If the dough is too thick, it will not cook evenly when put in the oven. It may remain doughy and lumpy, or become too tough to use, or perhaps burn around the edges and stay raw in the middle. Rolling the dough evenly and appropriately is an important step.

For obvious reasons, I need to try to cut the cookies effectively as possible. That is, I will try to divide up the appropriate responsibilities and tasks among the various cookies. This takes creative planning. I have to decide where on the rolled out dough to start cutting. On the edge? In the centre? Do I work around the edge and then into the middle? Do I work from the top to the bottom of the space?

I have worked with many managers who believed that the most important thing in using cookie cutters was to avoid leftover dough. They know that the logical way to do that is to use cutters that are in a consistent, perfect triangular shape. By

carefully turning the cutter up and down, they will make most efficient use of the dough. If they roll the dough out in the perfect shape they will create great efficiencies. I have known managers who actually believe that if they only use the right cutter, in the right position, they will eliminate all leftover dough and all inefficiencies. If only they could reorganize, expand, contract, or redefine job positions, they would use all the cookie dough in the perfect organizational structure.

Perhaps that approach does work somewhere, but it won't work in student services. A single shape of cookie cutter will not provide for the range of expertise needed in a student services organization. No matter how carefully I choose a particular cookie cutter, the person responsible for that cookie is going to have an effect on the shape and quality of the cookie. No matter how clearly I describe the contents of the cookie, the shape will need to change and develop over time.

The reality in student services and, I believe, in many of today's organizations, is that organizational cookies need to come in all different sizes and shapes. Some cookie cutters have thick edges that need a lot of initial pressure to cut through the dough, but that make a very defined and usable cookie. Other cutters are made of flexible material, and it is possible to adjust them a bit so that they fit into spaces around the tougher cookies. No matter how much you choose or use the cutters, no matter how you reorganize, expand, contract, or redefine job positions, you will never use all the cookie dough. There will always be unallocated spaces on the dough.

And that is a good thing! Because it is in this leftover cookie dough that creativity can flourish. It is in the leftover cookie dough that some of the toughest problems facing an organization will develop. It is when capable and dedicated people leave their cookie and work with others on the issues and problems in the

leftover cookie dough that the most improved strategies emerge. It is here that people work together collaboratively and creatively.

In organizations such as student services, and perhaps others that are human service oriented, there is a lot of activity necessarily addressed in the leftover dough. In student services, the most compelling and complex of student issues are out there in the leftover dough. Most of our organizations are structured around professions or functions: counselling, recreation, residence, or admissions. On the other hand, students' lives are not compartmentalized in the same way that we might choose to organize our cookie cutters. Each cookie can deal only with a portion of the student. The whole student is out there in the leftover dough, outside the boundaries of most position descriptions.

If we choose our cookie cutters carefully, what happens within the cookies will mostly take care of itself. The centre of the cookie is the professional area where capable people practice their profession according to the theory and practice of that profession and generally without a lot of advice or direction. It is toward the edge of the cookie that things become unclear, and where the transitional spaces can provide opportunity and challenge. As a manager, I am most concerned about making sure that the edges, where the leftover cookie dough begins, get the attention needed to provide the creative spark to the rest of the organization. That does not mean that cookies are not important. They are crucial, of course, to the success of the endeavour. But as any child will tell you, the leftover cookie dough is also very valuable.

So, as I prepare to roll out the dough, I will consciously leave some cookie dough as trans-positional space for creative and collaborative interaction. And I will encourage capable and creative staff to learn to thrive outside their boundaries, and

within the shared trans-positional spaces. It is there that we can develop an understanding of what it means to be truly collaborative.

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Appendix A: Areas of Inquiry for Interviews

Collaborative Practices of Exemplary College Student Services Practitioners:
An Exploration of Boundary Management Interactions

Introduction to interview
- Review of confidentiality and consent issues
- Review of opting out process
- Obtaining of signatures of consent

Stories of collaborative practice
- Remembered stories
- Individual students
- Groups of students
- General issues

Significance of collaborative practice
- Extent of practice, proportion of work time
- Impact on students
- Impact of personal experiences
- Advantages and disadvantages

Processes of collaborative practice
- Decision to collaborate
- Approaches to others
- Tactics chosen
- Usefulness of tactics
- Barriers and aids to collaborative practice

Nature of collaborative practice
- Different organizations, individuals, or groups who collaborated
- Internal to unit, external to unit, external to college
- What worked, what didn't
- Types of interaction (blurring, crossing, sharing, spanning)
- Tone/climate of interactions (warm, encouraging, trusting)
- Risks

Results of collaborative practice
- Stories of success and failure
- Stories of personal achievements, satisfactions

Other information
- Years of experience
- Current involvement in student services

Overall nature of experience

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation and Consent

Date

Dear_____,

(As you may be aware) I am currently a student in the Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, where I am pursuing a PhD in Educational Administration and Leadership.

I am interested in learning more about outstanding student services practitioners who work, or have worked in two-year colleges in Alberta. You are a past recipient of an award from your colleagues in Alberta, through the annual awards program of the provincial Services for Students Committee. According to the award brochure, you were a winner of an award in 199*.

I hope that this qualitative study will help to illuminate the practices and strategies that practitioners use in working collaboratively with others. The results of this study will provide a richer understanding of the meaningful practices and collaborative strategies used by successful practitioners. How do outstanding practitioners combine individuality and teamwork to enhance student success? How do they work with a variety of individuals to provide a coordinated, cohesive and transparent network that encourages growth and learning in college students? What boundary issues arise in collaborative work and how are the issues approached?

I need your help in this study, and would invite you to be a participant. It is my intent to begin the process with a "conversational interview" with you about your experiences. I would like to hear stories of success and failure. I anticipate that the initial interview will be one and a half to two hours long.

I will also ask that you complete the Hartmann Boundary Questionnaire, which is a tool that identifies individual boundary "thickness or thinness". I will ask you to complete this questionnaire on your own, and to convey to me only the final results. The questionnaire takes about 20 minutes to complete and compile. I will provide you with more information about the questionnaire when we meet.

I will be recording the initial interviews for transcription and analysis. I would then ask that you take time to review the results of my analysis, checking on my observations to ensure that they truly reflect your experiences.

Please understand that I will carefully preserve the identity of any individuals whose names or identity may be revealed in your 'stories'. I will further attempt to keep your own identity confidential. However, since you have been selected from a short list of possible participants, there is a good chance that people will know that you have participated. Be assured that I will take care to prevent any particular comment or observation from being connected to any individual. Institutions will not be identified or referred to in any way.

You are free to opt out of the study and to ask that any data collected from you be destroyed, returned, or not included in the study at any time. You may opt out simply by

contacting me via email, telephone or letter, or my supervisor, Dr. José da Costa, at 780-492-5868. I will also provide you with an executive summary of the research outcomes.

The results of this research may also be presented at professional and scholarly conferences, professional workshops, and may form the basis for articles and further study. If these occur, the same confidentiality guidelines will be held. All original data will be destroyed five years after the dissertation has been accepted by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.

I am anxious to have you as a participant in the study. If you need more information, I will be glad to talk with you further about the study.

If you agree to participate, I hope to conduct the interviews during October 2001. Please indicate your consent to participate by signing this letter prior to beginning our interview.

I will be contacting you shortly. Thanks so much for considering this.

Sincerely

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Signature of Consent
I hereby consent to participate in the study as outlined in this letter.

_____ _____
Signature Date